The Times History

of

The War in South Africa

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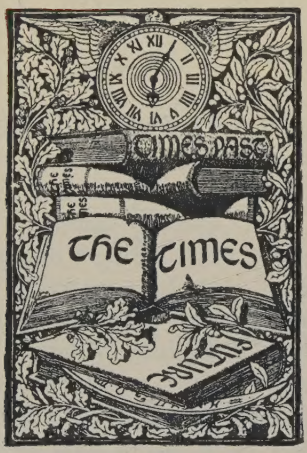
1899–1902



General Editor: L. S. Amery
Fellow of All Souls

Vol. V

Edited by Erskine Childers
Author of 'The Riddle of the Sands,' 'In the Ranks of the C.I.V.'

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE military aim which the British people and the British Army had set before themselves at the outbreak of the war had been achieved, and more than achieved, by the close of the first year. In his great marches, from Modder River Camp to the Portuguese frontier, Lord Roberts had swept away the stubborn resistance of the Boer armies, had triumphantly occupied all the chief towns of the two Republics, and had securely established himself upon the great arteries of communication. After Komati Poort there was no longer a single compact, centrally organised and centrally equipped Boer force in the field; the Boer artillery had almost disappeared; on every side the burghers were coming in to assure the conquerors that the surrender of those who were still in arms was but a matter of a few days or at the outside weeks. Few, indeed, there were who recognised that the British aim had been set too low, or understood the magnitude and character of the task that still lay between Lord Kitchener and the realisation of the national purpose expressed in the formal annexation of the Republics.

Yet there were abundant precedents to furnish a warning. The defeat of the Sepoy mutiny, the annexation of Burma, the Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had each had their aftermath of costly and exhausting guerilla warfare. In the last instance the activities of a few determined bands had occupied 200,000 men for two years. Why;

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if any considerable proportion of the Boers were minded to resist, should the effective occupation of the Republics call for a lesser effort? The area to be occupied was many times vaster and admirably suited to guerilla tactics. Here were no unorganised, ill-armed subjects of an Oriental despotism, but a free white people, the most obstinate, perhaps, of all the white races, well mounted, equipped with the best modern weapons, and still entirely unconvinced of any tactical inferiority to the invaders. Apart from the comparatively bloodless surrenders of Cronje and Prinsloo, they had suffered no really crushing defeats, they had never been subjected to punishing pursuit. The towns from which they had been driven had never been centres of their national life. What reason, after all, was there for supposing that their stubborn spirit had so lightly been schooled to submission?

That the British arms were bound ultimately to prevail was, indeed, reasonably certain, provided always that the resolution of the British people remained constant. Knowing its own mind clearly for once, the British nation assumed that its settled purpose was no less clearly realised by others, and saw only aimless and mischievous folly in the continued resistance to the formal expression of that purpose. But was it such folly to doubt British resolution? Twenty years earlier that resolution had been proclaimed in terms no less definite; then, too, all the towns had been in British hands; then, too, the British arms would undoubtedly have prevailed if the resolve behind them had not been shaken by the obstinacy of the Boer resistance. Many, indeed, of the Boers realised at a comparatively early period that the British temper had changed entirely since 1881. Of these, some who had surrendered or were made prisoners at the critical period immediately following the occupation of Pretoria, when it was almost a matter of chance who surrendered or who kept the field, were so impressed by their closer contact with the British that they came to share the British view as to the mischievous futility of continued resistance, and ultimately, finding all their efforts at persuasion unavailing, even took the field with the British against their old comrades in arms. Others, like Louis

Botha himself, saw that surrender was inevitable, and were anxious to come to terms with the British, but held that honour and interest alike pledged them to continue the war as long as their colleagues were resolved to do so, consoling themselves with the hope that they might at any rate improve the terms which would eventually be granted. Meanwhile the decision rested with those who, with President Steyn, were determined to take nothing for granted, but to fight on while there was still a burgher fit to fight, and to trust in the fortune that so often favours desperate resolution. The event failed to confirm their hopes. Innumerable minor successes could not stay the relentless progress of Kitchener's organisation of conquest; the weary and ruinous prolongation of the war left the British resolve unaffected. When the Boer leaders finally surrendered the terms of peace included not a single concession which the British Government would not have been prepared to grant after the fall of Pretoria, nearly two years earlier, or would not have granted if the war had continued to the capture of the last burgher.

Are we, then, to say that the prolongation of the war by the Boer leaders was a mere miscalculation, involving a futile destruction of life and property, alike for their own people and for their conquerors? That, indeed, is the only possible conclusion for those whose conception of war is based on the crude economic materialism which regards it as a mere waste of the general store of commodities, or on the sentimental individualism which shrinks with horror from the suffering and bloodshed which are its immediate concomitants. But for those who believe that character and will determine the destinies of nations, material as well as moral, who are prepared to maintain that the wasteful struggle of war may even, in the event, increase the material prosperity of both combatants, who realise that the loss of individual life is but a small thing when set in the scale against national welfare, the conclusion may well be different. The decision of the Boer leaders to prolong the war was an assertion of individual and national character over mere calculating reason. In the long, heroic struggle that followed

that character was strengthened, purified and chastened. The corruption, the insolent arrogance, the insatiate ambition which had grown up under the Kruger *régime* were sloughed off. The Boers, surrendering when they did and as they did, were a greater asset to the British Empire than they would have been if they had surrendered two years earlier. They had gained, not only in self-respect, but also in respect for British purpose and British power, in respect, too, for the principle of racial equality which the war was fought to assert and which it has asserted. Whatever mistakes may have been committed since, the foundations of racial harmony, based on mutual respect, of progress and development towards a prosperous and united South Africa, the equal of her sister nations in the Empire, were laid by the war, and laid the more securely because the struggle was so long and so keenly sustained.

And not only South Africa but England, too, has much that can be reckoned to the credit of the long duration of the struggle. The South African War was the first serious trial of the national spirit since England had become a democracy. The nation had stood that trial well during the critical and exciting phase of the struggle. Would it stand equally well the trial of patience and resolution involved in the tedious and costly sequel? The event proved that it could: from the first day of war to the last British soldiers and statesmen, each in their sphere, were able to act with the strength and certainty that come from the unquestioning support of a united people. The gain to the moral fibre of the nation from that exercise of patience and will-power has not been lost; the changes that have since taken place on the surface of politics imply no deep-going or permanent reaction on Imperial issues. Yet for England, as a whole, it may be doubted whether the long conflict had as great an influence on the moral as on the intellectual side. The war was a tremendous intellectual ferment. It shook the national self-complacency. It has made us look with new eyes upon all our existing institutions, upon all our most precious idols, upon all the unchallenged assumptions that stifled and overlay our national life. The political development of the next

generation will be the embodiment of the intellectual awakening which it called forth.

As a military operation the new war, for such it really was, will always be of compelling interest. It was no ordinary guerilla campaign carried on by roving bands led by irresponsible persons, devoid of a definite political purpose. It was a guerilla campaign *in excelsis*, deliberately entered upon by the national authorities, and deliberately adapted to the existing military organisation of the Republics. Throughout its continuance the political and military control of the Boer forces, and the organisation of those forces, remained intact. When the end came, the Boers, however reduced in numbers, still surrendered as two nations organised on a military footing. Nothing, indeed, could have illustrated more clearly than this campaign the enormous resisting power of a free democracy organised on a simple and comprehensive system of national military service. As long as there were burghers at large on the veld the Boer armies and the Boer Republics continued to exist. They could only be ended by piecemeal attrition, or by their own collective recognition of the uselessness of continuing the struggle. When we add to these considerations the fact that, from first to last, the Boers retained their tactical superiority in the open field wherever numbers were even approximately equal, when we remember how considerable the Boer numbers were, and how limited and unequal in training the mounted troops on the British side, we begin to realise the enormous difficulty of the task with which Kitchener and his subordinates had to cope and the greatness of their achievement.

With the exception of certain portions of the concluding chapter on the peace negotiations, which deals with events with which I was in close personal touch at the time, I have taken no part in the actual writing of the present volume, and have, as in Volume IV., confined myself to the purely editorial duty of criticism and suggestion. As regards the rest of the volume, the responsibility, both for the accuracy of the narrative and for the military judgments and criticisms expressed, rests entirely with Mr. Childers. The difficulty

of the task with which he has had to deal can only be estimated by those who have had experience of similar work. Of the quality of the result I leave it to the general reader and to the military student to judge.

L. S. AMERY.

THE TEMPLE, *April* 5, 1907.

PREFACE

My task in this volume is to describe the guerilla war. Mainly, I am concerned with Lord Kitchener's period of command, dating from the end of November 1900 to the conclusion of peace. To a certain extent, however, I have to traverse ground already covered, but only by way of forecast, in the preceding volume. For the guerilla war, so far from being coincident with Lord Kitchener's term of command, may be truly said to have originated at the end of August 1900, three months before Lord Roberts ceased to be Commander-in-Chief in South Africa. The first two chapters of this volume narrate the birth and growth of the guerilla war in the months of September, October and November 1900. While they record many instructive and a few stirring events, they must be regarded to some extent as preparatory to the rest of the volume.

Although "regular war" and "guerilla war" are convenient terms to denote two widely different forms of military activity, it would be a profound mistake to assume that they have nothing in common. Both pursue the same end and both are governed by the same fundamental principles. Whether the enemy be based on rich and populous towns, linked by a network of railways, or on nomadic knots of wagons filled from half-ravaged mealie fields, whether he draws ammunition from well-equipped arsenals or gleans it from deserted camping-grounds, whether he manœuvres in armies 100,000 strong or in commandos 500 strong, the problem of grappling with that enemy and forcing him to admit defeat is, in essentials, the same. Moreover, it is

the peculiar interest of guerilla war that it illuminates much that is obscure and difficult in regular war. Just as the Röntgen rays obliterate fleshy tissues and reveal the bony structure, so in the incidents of guerilla war there may be seen, stripped of a mass of secondary detail, the few dominant factors which sway the issue of great battles and great campaigns. Subjected to close analysis, one of Kitchener's combinations may be perceived to have succeeded or failed from the same causes which dictated the success or failure of Marlborough's combinations. It is equally true that in many of the short and sharp actions described in this volume there may be distinguished, following one another with kinematographic rapidity and vividness, the same phases through which long struggles on historic battlefields have passed.

It is in this spirit that the guerilla war should be studied. It will be found that the qualities which made for success in it are qualities which make for success in operations of the grandest scope, and which, recognised more clearly and striven for more ardently in the early stages of the South African War, would have shortened the campaign. In so far as these qualities are found to have been developed during the last year and a half of the war, so far should the methods evolved in that period become permanent models for future military effort. Conversely, whenever those methods contravene broad military principles, they should be acknowledged as makeshifts and frankly discarded. The touchstone by which all should be criticised is their applicability to the most varied contingencies. Two examples will suffice. If mobility, physical and mental, strategical, tactical and individual, seemed to be supremely requisite in the effort to close with and overcome the will-o'-the-wisp partisans who continued for so long to challenge the might of their great adversary, let us not overlook the fact that the same mobility was equally requisite on the first day of the war, and will be equally valuable in any campaign of whatever sort that the future may have in store for us. If, with every day the guerilla war lasted, the rifle, in contradistinction to the gun and the *arme blanche*, stood out more and more clearly as the weapon of decisive efficacy, let us throw the light of that fact

not only upon the regular war in South Africa but upon wars in general and see if it does not suggest some broad conclusions as to the proper function of artillery, and as to the utility, if any, of the *arme blanche*, in the conflicts of the future. And when, to combine both illustrations, we seek to obtain in his perfection the mobile rifleman, let that ideal figure have an universal quality, transcending even the most elementary classifications. Let us draw no impassable line between horsemen and infantry, but rather set both arms, each according to its own capacity and each instructed by lessons derived from the other, to pursue the same end. Above all, when the inquiry is narrowed to the special functions of mounted men, let us shake off the fetters of verbal definition, dismiss for a moment the time-honoured terminology of cavalry and mounted infantry, and, piercing to the heart of the matter, find what it is we really want, and construct, if necessary, a single definition to meet a single need. Thus, and thus only, can we reap the full harvest of military wisdom from the finest school for mounted troops that Britain has ever obtained or is ever likely to obtain.

When I began work in the summer of 1904, drafts for the early part of the narrative, the period now covered by the first five chapters, had already been written by Colonel C. à Court Repington, C.M.G., the military correspondent of *The Times*. I need scarcely say what great advantage I derived from building on a groundwork prepared by that able and distinguished writer.

The only other part of the volume which needs any special reference is the concluding chapter, entitled "Peace." Mr. Amery, in his capacity of General Editor, has largely remodelled my draft of this chapter and, as it now stands, he is solely responsible for it. For all the preceding chapters I take full responsibility. Having made this explanation, I hasten to express my deep sense of obligation to Mr. Amery, both for the collection of the original material on which the volume was based, and for invaluable criticism and advice.

Mr. Basil Williams, the editor of the fourth volume, besides setting me a high example, has given me many

excellent suggestions. To Mr. G. P. Tallboy's accurate and efficient work in the preparation of maps and appendices and in the general revision of the volume, I owe more than I can easily estimate. In proof correction, I have received valuable help from my father-in-law, Mr. Hamilton Osgood.

In regard to maps, I have to thank Lieutenant J. A. G. Elliot, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, for those of Frederikstad and Bakenlaagte; and Lieutenant P. O. G. Usborne, R.E., for those of Springhaan's Nek, Dewetsdorp, Itala, French's operations in the Eastern Transvaal, and Botha's attempt to invade Natal. The map of Bothaville is taken from a sketch kindly supplied by Major H. de B. Hovell, D.S.O., of the Worcestershire Regiment; that of Groen Kop is by Lieutenant W. Hyde Kelly, R.E., and that of Langverwacht by Captain G. Hartley Watson, of the 3rd Dragoon Guards. Captain P. C. Paff was good enough to provide the materials for the map illustrating the labyrinthine wanderings of the Transvaal Government. In respect to general information, I should like to take this opportunity of thanking Lieut.-Colonel R. M. Holden, of the Cameronians, for notes concerning the Cuban blockhouse system, and the Marquis and Marchioness of Tullibardine for information about the Scottish Horse.

It is scarcely necessary to say that, in addition to all the sources I have named, use has been made of a vast quantity of information from officers in the army and others connected with the events described, and I have to acknowledge the unfailing courtesy and generosity with which this information has been placed at my disposal.

Two remarks may be added. One relates to a point of terminology. Throughout this volume, the countries which we were engaged in conquering are called the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, or, for brevity, the Free State. In the latter case, the appellation is technically incorrect; for both countries had been annexed to the British dominions at a date prior to the period covered by this volume. I found, however, that to use the new name "Orange River Colony" while describing warlike operations lasting for a year and a half, involved much awkwardness

and confusion, mainly due to the unsuitability of the term in describing Boer plans and points of view. This circumstance alone should excuse the technical inaccuracy.

The other remark has reference to one of the many shortcomings of the volume. From the nature of the operations described therein, it is inevitable that a great number of small episodes, highly honourable to those who took part in them and well worth recording, must, owing to limitations of space, go unrecorded. I can only crave indulgence for these omissions and plead the necessity for maintaining, as far as possible, a just historical perspective.

ERSKINE CHILDERS.

April 5, 1907.

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The Times History

OF

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER I

THE AWAKENING IN THE FREE STATE

(August–December, 1900)

I

British hopes at the end of September, 1900.

At the end of September, 1900, when Lord Roberts, carrying all before him, had reached the Portuguese border, the collapse of the Boer arms seemed to be complete. The main army had dissolved in panic; President Kruger had fled; both as military and political powers the two Republics seemed to have been obliterated. It was true that a few thousand men, downcast but organised, were known to be plodding through the fever-stricken bush-veld to a rallying-point in the far north. It was true, also, that even from the far south of the Free State disquieting reports were dropping in of ferment among the scattered peasants, and of commandos which sprang phantom-like from the veld and vanished at the first touch. But few were disposed to attach much importance to these phenomena. They were read rather as signs of a somewhat difficult pacification by police methods than as omens of a new war which was to last for a year and a half.

The source of the Guerilla War.

In order to trace to its fountain-head this new war, the reader must carry his mind back to a period six weeks before the capture of Komati Poort, and view in imagination a certain sultry camping-ground on the banks of the Crocodile River, 34 miles north-west of Pretoria and 15 miles north of

the Magaliesberg range. It was here, at Zoutpansdrift, in the middle of August, that Christiaan de Wet and President Steyn had at last found a momentary rest after that breathless chase from the Vaal, which was described in Volume IV. under the name of the First de Wet Hunt.* Whatever despondency reigned at this period among the Transvaal leaders, there was none in the breasts of these two men, who now, and for nearly two years longer, were the life and soul of the Boer resistance. On the 18th they parted. Steyn, as we have seen, came up with the main Boer army at Machadodorp on August 25, and threw himself into the well-nigh hopeless task of re-animating the demoralised burghers. De Wet, for his part, resolved to return home to the Free State, there to re-organise the commandos and revive the war. How, for safety's sake, he sent off the major part of his force, under Steenekamp, to the northern bush-veld, with orders to seek a favourable opportunity of rejoining him in the Free State; how, while his enemies' eyes were fixed on the dust of the great laager, de Wet, with 230 men, struck off to the south, and, avoiding the main passes of the Magaliesberg which were all strongly held, scaled the steep crags at a point almost in view of the garrison at Commando Nek; how he marched on by night, evaded Hart, crossed the branch railway at Bank, picked up Danie Theron's corps of scouts, forded the Vaal, entered the Free State, and, on August 22, set up his headquarters at Rhenosterpoort; all this was narrated in the last volume. We take up the tale from that point.

De Wet returns to his own country.

When de Wet regained his country he found it still suffering under the stunning blow of Prinsloo's surrender. The commandos in the field were both few and weak. Many burghers had taken the oath of neutrality; several hundred had surrendered and given up their Mausers; but the greater part had simply returned to their farms and now remained quiescent, watching the march of events, and awaiting the master-spirit which should galvanise them into action and combine this action to a common end. To all Free Staters de Wet sent round the fiery cross of revolt. Philip

Condition of the Free State, Aug. 1900.

The fiery cross.

* See vol. iv., chap. xii.

Botha was despatched to collect the burghers of Vrede and Harrismith, Michal Prinsloo to bring up General Fourie from Ladybrand, while in all directions sped trusty messengers with the warning to the burghers to be ready for action. To Piet Fourie, appointed a Vice-Commander-in-Chief, was given the charge of the districts of Bloemfontein, Smithfield, Rouxville and Wepener; Judge Hertzog, with a similar title, was appointed to Fauresmith, Philippolis and Jacobsdal; while Scheepers and Captain Pretorius went on in advance to warn the burghers to be prepared for the arrival of "Oom Piet" and the "Rechter." To the Boshof and Hoopstad districts, Field-Cornet C. C. Badenhorst was sent on a similar mission which proved so successful that he was promoted, first to Commandant and then to Vice-Commander-in-Chief. All these leaders at once raised considerable bands of followers — Fourie 750, Hertzog 1,200, and Badenhorst 1,000; which, added to the commandos, groups and smaller parties still in the field, made up a far larger total than was understood at Pretoria.

Raids on the railway.

With his own band, weakened by the emissaries he had despatched in all directions, de Wet personally could venture little, and determined to make it his particular business to interrupt the communications of the army by wrecking the railway and telegraph south of Pretoria. He allotted this special duty to Scheepers and his gang, but in order to secure a supply of dynamite for the purpose he paid a visit in person to Potchefstroom. It was on this occasion that he was photographed with rifle in hand, the chief interest of the circumstance residing in the fact that the rifle was the two-hundredth that had been retrieved from a heap surrendered to the British, burnt by them, and repaired by the Boers. Scheepers and the men told off to raid the communications effected their purpose with some thoroughness. On September 1 the line was cut near Klip River station, and a train captured and burnt; on the same day the line was blown up in three places between Kroonstad and Roodewal; on the 3rd and 6th, culverts were destroyed at Serfontein; on the 8th, the railway was blown up in five places between Leeuwspruit and Vredefort Road; on the 17th, the same

section was blown up in twenty-one places; and on the 18th and 20th similar mischief was wrought at Ventersburg and Vredefort Road. These demolitions did not, it is true, impede the general march of events. Construction trains were always at hand; damage was rapidly made good, and traffic resumed. On the other hand, the night running of trains had to be almost universally suspended, and a strong tendency set in to divert troops from field operations to the railway, and thus to weaken the British hold on the country.

Sterility of British operations in August and September.

That hold, even apart from these abstractions, was weak enough. During the months of August and September the troops in occupation of the Free State had effected little or nothing. Towards the end of August,* under a scheme initiated by Lord Roberts for the formation of "flying" columns, the Free State had been divided up among various commanders with a view of allotting a definite sphere of activity to each. General Rundle, for instance, with his Eighth Division, was made responsible for the north-eastern angle, and, while maintaining fairly strong garrisons at Harrismith and Ficksburg, and smaller posts at Thaba 'Nchu and Ladybrand, had to find two mobile columns to work his district. For this purpose he based Major-General Boyes on Vrede, and Major-General B. Campbell on Harrismith. To the west of Rundle Hunter's command began, to the west of Hunter that of C. E. Knox, and so on, each commander being allotted certain towns to garrison, and columns with which to operate. General Kelly-Kenny remained at Bloemfontein with general charge and supervision of the whole. The mobile columns were directed to pacify the country, to pursue and break up all formed bodies of the enemy, to remove all horses and forage, and to collect the cattle and livestock of all burghers who had broken the oath of neutrality, or whose sons were absent on commando.

Inadequacy of the "mobile" columns.

These arrangements were the best that circumstances permitted for the moment, but they were altogether inadequate to meet the new situation. The designation of columns

* See vol. iv., pp. 488, 489.

as "flying" or "mobile" was an abuse of terms. Each was composed mainly of infantry, with guns, howitzers, field hospital and bearer companies, engineers, and all the paraphernalia of small armies, including cumbrous trains of wagons drawn by oxen, generally overloaded, and with teams and conductors far inferior in efficiency to those of the Boers. These columns marched solemnly about the country at an average pace of ten to fifteen miles a day, and, wherever they moved, were masters of the situation. The word had gone out that they were not to be opposed but that, after their departure, the towns and districts through which they had passed were immediately to be re-occupied. Accurately informed of the British movements by their scouts and native spies, the burghers ran few risks of capture, and even on the rare occasions when they were surprised, simply scattered and galloped away till they were out of sight.

Scarcity of mounted troops.

Even if the kind of column required by the changing conditions of the campaign had been conceived, the mounted troops needed were not as yet available. In Rundle's command Boyes had only 500 mounted men, and Campbell 200; in other parts of the Free State MacDonald had 350, Hunter 250, White 300, the Wepener and Dewetsdorp forces 400, Le Gallais 230, and C. E. Knox 106. Indeed, it is probable that in the middle of September the total number of mounted troops in the Free State did not amount to one-third of those at the disposal of the Boers. Nor were the quality and equipment of these mounted troops at all equal to the situation. An endeavour to discover the weight carried at this period by the horses of the Yeomanry showed that the average load was between 20 and 21 stone, while a large proportion both of the Yeomanry and Mounted Infantry horses were suffering from sore backs owing to the bad management of their riders. The result was that, for all practical purposes, these columns were nothing but escorts to their own supply columns. The British walked where they liked, and the Boers rode where they pleased, and, under such conditions, the campaign might have continued for ten years without any appreciable change. The diffi-

Heavy equipment.

culties under which the various generals laboured at this period were not realised at home, and caused many undeserved criticisms to be made upon those who were doing their best with the material under their hand.

Character of the new rising not realised

Nor was the nature and extent of the new uprising caused by the infectious energy of de Wet appreciated at head-quarters. The wish was father to the thought. "The numbers of the enemy now in the field," telegraphed Lord Roberts to his generals early in September, "are steadily decreasing, especially in the Orange River Colony. It is absolutely essential that, when once our troops get in touch with the enemy, they should on no account be left until they have been broken up or forced to surrender."

Siege and relief of Ladybrand, Sept. 1–5.

How difficult it was to gain touch, still more to break up the light-footed Boer commandos with the ponderous British columns, was well exemplified by the proceedings after the relief of Ladybrand. This little post was held by 80 men of the 1st Worcester Regiment, 43 Wiltshire Yeomanry, and 30 local volunteers, the whole under the command of Major F. White, R.M.L.I. On the evening of September 1 a patrol came in with a report of the approach of the enemy from Modderpoort, and on the 2nd, at 7.30 A.M., a letter, signed by Commandant Piet Fourie, was sent in asking for the immediate surrender of the garrison. White, having replied that if Fourie wanted the garrison he had better come and take it, posted the whole of his slender force on an intrenched hill to the south-west of the town. Fourie, with 800 men, opened shell and rifle fire, worked up to the post, and surrounded it on all sides. For three days and nights, however, the little garrison held firm. Of the Worcesters, Lieutenants Dorman and Moss and Corporal Kirkham, and of the Yeomanry Lieutenant Henderson and Sergeant-Major Lyford deserve special mention in this very fine defence, which Major White directed with marked

Sept. 5.

resolution and ability. The town was relieved by Bruce Hamilton on the morning of September 5. While marching to Thaba 'Nchu on the 2nd he had heard of the attack from Sir G. Lagden at Maseru. Picking up the garrison of Thaba 'Nchu, Bruce Hamilton pushed on rapidly, his infantry

covering no less than seventy miles in 3½ days. Le Gallais having joined him on the night of the 4th, the united columns * drove off Fourie, who retreated towards the Doornberg. But no retribution could be exacted. It was in vain that the columns of Bruce Hamilton, Le Gallais, Boyes, Campbell and MacDonald, under the general command of Hunter, converged upon the Doornberg. The Free Staters had no intention of repeating the mistake of Prinsloo, and although Rundle and MacDonald made prize of thirty wagons, a mountain gun and some ammunition on the 17th, the enemy escaped to the north without being brought to serious action. Indeed, it was only by the most fortuitous concurrence of lucky circumstances that the heavy British columns of this period even so much as caught sight of their fleet antagonists. This failure to keep touch, aggravated by the absence of any reliable system of intelligence, produced the strangest vagaries in the estimates made from time to time of the Boer forces afoot. While Lord Roberts expressed his belief on September 27 that there were only 3,000 burghers fighting in the Free State, Hunter, on the 11th, had informed his subordinates that there were 5,000 to 8,000 in the Doornberg alone. The plains and hills were certainly swarming with burghers, but they could not be brought to action.

Failure of subsequent operations, Sept.

Faulty intelligence.

II

Frederikstad

On September 27, just at the climax of the victorious advance of the main army in the Transvaal, Lord Roberts made a new effort to cope with the strange situation in the Free State.

He proposed to form a base of supplies at Heilbron, which had been occupied by Dalgety's Colonial Division on the 26th; he ordered Rundle with Campbell's Brigade to Vrede,

Roberts makes a redistribution, Sept. 27.

* 1st Cameron Highlanders, ½ batt. Royal Sussex Regt., ½ batt. Bedfordshire Regt., 490 M.I., two cos. R.I. Rifles, one co. Worcester Regiment, 250 Imperial Yeomanry, two pom-poms, four guns 39th Battery R.F.A.

Boyes to Reitz and Frankfort, Bruce Hamilton to Lindley, and MacDonald to Kroonstad, while Hunter was directed to move about with Le Gallais to any point where his presence might be required. "Clear the whole of supplies," Roberts added, "and inform the burghers that if they choose to listen to de Wet and carry on a guerilla warfare against us, they and their families will be starved." It was a *brutum fulmen*. Practically the initiative rested with de Wet, and he soon proceeded to prove the fact. Hitherto he had remained in the north-west, hatching future schemes, and here he was rejoined by Commandant van Aard, of Kroonstad, leading part of the force which had been left with Steenekamp in the Transvaal. The rest, so van Aard reported, had returned to the Free State also, and were near Heilbron. In concert with Fourie, Froneman and Hertzog, who were all now with de Wet, further plans were made for the revival of the war.

De Wet takes the field, Sept. 20.

In order to rejoin Philip Botha and Hattingh, who were in command of the Harrismith and Vrede burghers, it was necessary to cross the railway, and the passage was duly

Sept. 21.

effected, but not without loss, on the night of September 21 between Roodewal and Serfontein Siding. Van Aard and his men were now sent on to recruit at their farms between Kroonstad and Lindley; while de Wet himself proceeded

Sept. 25.

towards Heilbron. On the 25th, at Spitzkop, he met and addressed Hattingh's men. Taught by bitter experience that wagons were a crushing hindrance to mobility, he now used his utmost endeavours to make these burghers abandon them and become horse commandos pure and simple. But his words fell on unwilling ears, and although some men remained with him, the greater part defied his orders and led their precious wagons and teams back to their farms. It was just at this moment that the Colonial Division, under the scheme of redistribution outlined above, reached Heilbron. De Wet at once called out the Heilbron commando, and with the few faithful burghers of Vrede and Harrismith, found himself at the head of about 800 men and two guns. Not caring to tackle the Colonials, he re-crossed the railway near Wolvehoek on the early morning of October 1, wrecked

it as he passed, marched thence to the west of Vredefort and thence across the Vaal. There was a rather slack pursuit by the Colonial Division, ending in the complete loss of touch. Crosses the Vaal

On October 12 de Wet received a report from General Liebenberg to the effect that General Barton's column was at Frederikstad Station, and might be attacked with advantage if de Wet would bring up his force. To this de Wet consented, sending word that he would come in a week's time. After an ostentatious retreat through Schoeman's Drift to the Rhenoster River, he doubled back, recrossed the Vaal, and reached the vicinity of Frederikstad early on October 20. Here, uniting with Liebenberg, he found himself at the head of 1,500 men. and marches to Frederikstad, Oct. 20.

Barton's presence at Frederikstad must be explained by a brief digression. At the end of August both he and Hart were at Krugersdorp, but during the whole of September Hart had been absent on an extensive tour in the west, returning with the scanty prize of 96 prisoners, most of whom had been captured by the surprise of Potchefstroom on September 10, an operation conducted in a bold and energetic manner. In an earlier fight on September 5 Hart had scored another success, for the famous Danie Theron was killed in a skirmish on the Gatsrand, and de Wet thus deprived of his most trusted leader of scouts. When Hart returned to Krugersdorp, Barton in his turn was directed by Roberts to move out. Starting on October 5 with a column of all arms,* he reached Roodewal on the 7th, and on the 9th drove the enemy out of a strong position near Dwarsvlei. On the 10th orders came from Pretoria to march towards the Gatsrand and head de Wet, who was reported, prematurely, to have crossed the Vaal with 1,000 men and four guns, closely pursued. The "close pursuit" was a myth, for the Colonial Division, having lost touch on the 8th, had halted at Witkopjes, near Reitzburg, and there remained for more than a fortnight. Barton's previous operations, Sept.–Oct.

* 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 19th Company I.Y. (Oxfordshire), 200 Marshall's Horse, 40 Bushmen, 80 M.I. Royal Welsh and Royal Scots Fusiliers, 4 guns 78th Battery, 2 guns 28th Battery, one 4·7-inch gun, one pom-pom.

The position at Frederikstad.

Barton, moving by Bank and Welverdiend, marched south to the Gatsrand. On the 15th he was hotly opposed by Liebenberg at Buffelsdoorn Pass, and two days later the column reached Frederikstad. On the 18th the Imperial Light Horse and the 79th Co. I.Y., about 500 troopers in all, with two pom-poms, joined the column, and on the 20th a convoy of supplies arrived safely. Frederikstad lies close to the Mooi River, within a circle of low hills through which the river and the railway wend their way in almost parallel lines. On his arrival, Barton placed the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under Col. Sir R. Colleton, close to the river and a mile to the north-west of the railway-station. A mile and a half south the Royal Scots Fusiliers (Col. Carr), and Marshall's Horse, held part of a long ridge known as South Hill, and the rest of the force was at or about the station.

Map, p. 12.

De Wet invests Barton, Oct. 20.

On the morning of the 20th, at 11.30, de Wet's approach was signalled from South Hill, and a telegram was at once sent off to Pretoria asking that the pursuing column, referred to in Roberts's telegram of the 10th, might be directed to Frederikstad. About the same time the first contact was gained. Early that morning Sir R. Colleton had been sent out towards Buffelsvlei, on the Potchefstroom road, with a reconnoitring party of three companies of his Welsh Fusiliers, the I.L.H., and two guns. Returning, on an urgent summons from Barton, the force, when about 2½ miles from camp, was attacked in flank by several hundred Boers who galloped through the nek (marked A) leading through the western part of South Hill. Owing to a misunderstanding the mounted troops retired to camp too soon, so that Colleton's infantry were left to resist the attack unsupported. Eventually, but not without difficulty and loss, they made good their retreat.

Neither de Wet nor Liebenberg had any valid reason to anticipate success against Barton's strong column, but deceived by the defensive attitude of the enemy, they proceeded to encircle the British positions on all sides, and to begin their attack with considerable vigour, firing heavily upon the troops until dark. Thus, within a month of the grand

débâcle in the north, the Boers were already beginning to assume an audacious offensive.

In the course of the night Barton made fresh dispositions. Removing the camps from the low-lying ground and abandoning the railway station, he chose as his main position Gun Hill. On the summit, some two miles east of the station, he placed the 4·7 gun and two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Lower down to the westward were the four field-guns. Still further west, overlooking a deep cutting on the railway, were three companies of the Royal Welsh, while the remaining companies, together with most of the mounted troops and one pom-pom, were on the northern slopes between the railway and the river. Two miles south, a portion of South Hill was still held by the greater part of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, Marshall's Horse, two field-guns and a pom-pom. In the belief that a column was following the Boers, Barton gave out that the object of the operations was to hold de Wet until the pursuers appeared, and it was under this apprehension that the subsequent action of the force was conducted. Barton's new dispositions, Oct. 20.

On Sunday, the 21st, Barton was thoroughly invested, and for four days de Wet prosecuted the attack. Carr's position on South Hill was threatened from the westerly part of the same ridge, from East Hill, and from Wooded Hill. Gun Hill was fired on from all sides, and was particularly harassed by a skilfully-worked pom-pom north of the river. On the 22nd, however, the 4·7 gun put an end to the nuisance, a shell at last finding its mark and killing the whole of the gun detachment. On the 23rd it was seen that the Boers had pushed forward their schanzes in the night to the bushy slopes and rocks west of South Hill, 400 yards from the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Able from this new position to see the loopholes of the defenders against the sky-line, they opened a damaging fire, killing Lieutenant Finch, in charge of the Maxim gun, and wounding many of the Fusiliers. This attack was seconded by the fire of a Boer pom-pom and maxim from Wooded Hill, and by a gun skilfully placed on Pointed Hill. On the 24th de Wet made his chief effort against the Welsh Fusiliers on Gun Hill, but no serious attempt was made to assault the position. Indecisive attacks, Sept. 21–24.

Final attack repulsed, Sept. 25.

Having now threatened the column from every side in vain, and realising that his situation demanded either decisive action or retreat, de Wet arranged for a culminating stroke. He ordered that Froneman and Liebenberg, at nightfall on the 24th, should lead their men on foot against the centre of the British position, leaving their horses beyond the river and making for a portion of the railway embankment between the station and Gun Hill, where they would be favourably placed to rush the headquarter camp. In the small hours of the 25th the presence of Boers on the railway was duly reported to General Barton, but in the belief that only a few snipers had occupied the position, only one company, under Captain Baillie of the Scots Fusiliers, was detailed to drive them away. The company was roughly checked, Baillie and four of his men being killed and others wounded. Recognizing the serious nature of the situation, Barton now formed a stronger column of attack under Major Lyle of the Welsh Fusiliers. Three companies of the Welsh from Gun Hill and two of the Scots from South Hill were ordered to converge upon the embankment. Moving in widely extended lines these fine troops overcame the stubborn resistance of the Boers, who finally left their shelter and, throwing away rifles and bandoliers, fled on foot under a storm of fire.

In his account of this fight de Wet declares that Liebenberg's men made default at the night's rendezvous, and that only Froneman with 80 men had obeyed his orders. It is not possible to accept this statement, since 82 Boers, killed, wounded, and prisoners, many of whom were Liebenberg's men, were accounted for in Lyle's attack, while a considerable number escaped. The truth seems to have been that de Wet detailed 700 men for the attack, with instructions to rush Barton's camp during the night, but that only 200 appeared and were not strong enough to risk the venture or repel the subsequent assault.

De Wet retreats unpursued, Sept. 25.

At the very moment when this attack was in progress the advance of a relieving column from Welverdiend under Colonel Hicks was reported to friends and foes.* Thoroughly

* Hicks's column: two guns Elswick Battery, Essex Regiment, ½ batt. Dublin Fusiliers, half Strathcona's Horse, 2nd Brabant's Horse.

FREDERIKSTAD.
ATTACKED BY DEWET OCT. 21-25.
SCALE OF MILES
2 MILES
DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Cultivation
Drift
Farms
Mounted Troops
To Buffelsvlei
Hill
Single Railway
Track
Welsh Fusiliers
R.W.F. (Reserve)
FREDERIKSTAD
Station
Culvert
Quarry
To Potchefstroom
Kraal
Nek
R.W.F. Maxim
GUN HILL
Road to Welverdiend
Boers in position Oct 24
SOUTH HILL
dam
EAST HILL
WOODED HILL
POINTED HILL

baffled, and with considerable loss in killed, wounded, and captured, de Wet parted with Liebenberg, and gathering up the Free Staters, trekked away to the southward as rapidly as he had come. There was little or no pursuit. Barton had endeavoured to arrange for a local pursuit by the I.L.H., who were ordered to support the infantry attack, but by some mismanagement the I.L.H. were allowed to leave their horses far in the rear, under the charge of Kaffirs, so that the tactical opportunity slipped away. A general pursuit by the whole body of his mounted men, of whom, after Hicks's arrival, he had some 1,200, was not attempted by Barton. It was only after the lapse of two days that Colleton was sent out with the mounted troops, to return with the news that de Wet had gone towards Lindeque Drift. Otherwise, under the strategical hypothesis which had induced him to accept investment by a force not stronger than his own, Barton had done well

De Wet retires without pursuit.

III

Bothaville

There now entered upon the scene an officer who was destined to give de Wet many an anxious moment. General Charles Knox had been at Heilbron on the 21st, and as soon as the proceedings at Frederikstad were known he was ordered by Roberts to unite the Colonial Division with the troops under De Lisle and Le Gallais and to push on to Barton's assistance. Although the Colonials had just been greatly weakened by the withdrawal of 400 men, discharged or on leave, and now numbered but 600, and although the Mounted Infantry were very weak, this command of mounted men was a better weapon for an enterprising leader than the ponderous columns of infantry which had been labouring long and aimlessly on the stern chase of their more mobile foe. On the 23rd, at Witkopjes, Knox united De Lisle's troops with the Colonial Division now under Colonel Maxwell, and on the 25th moved to Reitzburg, where he was joined by Le Gallais from Bothaville. On the 26th, having left Le Gallais to hold the Tygerfontein valley, he reached

Charles Knox takes the field, Oct. 23.

Oct. 25–6.

Potchefstroom, and hearing there that de Wet was supposed to have headed towards Lindeque Drift, he moved at 4 A.M. on the 27th to Hartebeestpoort, while Le Gallais was ordered to cross the Vaal at Venterskroon and work round towards Vredefort.

De Wet overtaken at Rensburg Drift, Oct. 27.

But it was now learnt that de Wet had gone towards Tygerfontein on the previous afternoon with the object of crossing the Vaal at Schoeman's Drift, but that finding the valley held he had doubled back, and was on the way to Buffelshoek with the evident intention of crossing at Rensburg Drift. Knox, after resting his horses, pushed forward at 11.30 A.M. on a hot scent, and was rewarded at 5.15 P.M. by running into his quarry at Rensburg Drift. De Lisle's Australians had pressed on so fast that they passed through the Boer rear screen and cut it off from the main body. On the farther side of the drift the Boer laager was just being inspanned, and the river bed was full of Boers. The pom-pom put some fifty shells into the laager before it struggled away, while "R" Battery shelled the men below. Flying up the hill towards Witkopjes, the burghers were suddenly seen to wheel round and gallop off towards Parys. Le Gallais, reaching the high ground about Grooteiland, had headed them, and for a moment a great success seemed possible. But the Colonials took some time to cross the river, which was rising rapidly, darkness fell at 6.30 P.M., and to crown all a terrific thunderstorm burst upon the troops. Amidst all the resulting confusion de Wet got clean away; but two of his guns were lost, eight of his wagons captured, and 24 Boers were killed, wounded or taken. The storm continued all night, rendering further pursuit impracticable; nor was it till late on the 28th that Knox managed to bring all his transport across.

De Wet meets Steyn, Oct. 31.

De Wet meanwhile had hurried away to the east, then swerved south-west, outspanning on the 29th at Winkeldrift in the Rhenoster valley. Learning at this moment that President Steyn was returning from his wanderings in the Transvaal and desiring to meet him, he left instructions with Froneman to proceed to Bothaville, and himself journeyed north to Ventersdorp with a small escort. Here he met

MAJOR GENERAL SIR C. E. KNOX, K.C.B.

Photo by Elliot & Fry.

Steyn on October 31, and the two returned together to Bothaville, where they united with Froneman. A plan of far-reaching importance was now concerted. Steyn had given de Wet a full account of the collapse of the Boer arms on the Portuguese frontier, and of the flight of the commandos. In his turn he learnt from de Wet that the Free State was already on the road to reinvigoration. How could the best use be made of this new spirit? The Transvaal for the present was prostrate. In order to assist it to stagger to its feet, some resolute diversion must be made in other quarters. It was decided accordingly to invade Cape Colony, foment the rebellious instincts of the Dutch, and embarrass the British by a vast widening of the area of hostilities. But de Wet and Steyn had not reckoned on Knox.

They decide to invade Cape Colony.

Having completely lost the scent, Knox had decided to sweep to the west on a broad front and so endeavour to regain it. Le Gallais, sent round by rail to Honingspruit, stood on the left; De Lisle, at Kopjes Station, in the centre; and the Colonial Division, at Grootvlei, on the right. Le Gallais * struck the trail of a Boer force on the afternoon of November 5, some ten miles east of Bothaville, and at 3 P.M. pushed out a reconnaissance towards that place. As the leading scouts approached the ruins of the village, which had been almost entirely destroyed by Hunter a short time before, Boer guns opened upon them from some low hills south of the Valsch. Later, some of the 8th M.I. on the left, and some of the 5th on the right, crossed the river with a view of turning the Boer position, but the gathering darkness allowed them to do no more than picket the south bank of the river. The rest of the force marched into Bothaville as the moon rose, and encamped in the village square. Here it was ascertained that de Wet and Froneman had arrived in the course of the day, and that Steenekamp with de Wet's convoy was also present. On this night Knox with De Lisle's column encamped ten miles north of Bothaville, at Eland's Vlei. The Colonial Division had been sent away on a false scent to the Vaal.

Fresh pursuit by Knox.

Le Gallais gains touch, Nov. 5.

* 5th, 7th, and 8th Mounted infantry, 17th and 18th companies I.Y., four guns "U" Battery R.H.A., and a few Bushmen.

Action of Bothaville, Nov. 6.

Map, p. 20.

After his skirmish with Le Gallais, whose strength he greatly overrated, de Wet had outspanned at Doornkraal farm, about five miles from the river, keeping the Valsch between himself and the British troops. He had placed a picket near the river, and at dawn on the 6th the burgher in charge came down and informed him that all was well, that nothing had been seen but some wreaths of smoke ascending from the north bank of the river, and that it was believed that this smoke came from the British camp. Hardly had the corporal made his report when from a low hill not 300 yards distant rifle fire was poured into the still sleeping camp. De Wet, for once, had been surprised.

De Wet surprised.

Le Gallais's men, who had not turned in until midnight, were in the saddle again at 4 A.M., and taking up the spoor of the Boers guns found it led south from Bothaville. Two miles from camp the 5th M.I.* under Major Kenneth Lean, who were in advance, stumbled upon the Boer picket of five men fast asleep and made them prisoners without a shot. This lucky stroke decided the fortunes of the day. Realising with quick instinct that the laager must be close at hand, Lean sent back for the guns, and with the 67 men under his hand galloped forward across the open undulating veld to some rising ground in his front, where suddenly the laager came into view not 300 yards distant, the men asleep, the wagons and guns outspanned, and the horses grazing loose.

Lean's plucky attempt.

It was 5.30 A.M. In a moment 40 men were off their horses, and lining the crest, opened magazine fire upon the laager. The surprise was complete. Panic-stricken and without a thought of defending themselves, the greater number of the burghers, including Steyn and de Wet, jumped up, seized the first horses they could find, and galloped away. The rest, about 130 in number, unable to find their horses, many of which had stampeded, grasped their rifles and threw themselves down behind the low stone walls of a garden near the laager and endeavoured to make a stand to save the guns.

* Very weak companies of Buffs, Worcesters, Royal Irish Regt., and East Yorkshires.

To the left front of the ridge which Lean had occupied, there stood a small red farmhouse with a stone kraal just beyond, and a dash was made for these by Captain Colvile, commanding the Oxford L.I. detachment of the 5th M.I.* Colvile himself seized and occupied the stone kraal, while Lieutenant Percy Smith and a few men flung themselves into the farm. Almost at the same moment, Lieutenant Otter Barry's two guns of "U" Battery R.H.A. galloped up and came into action close to the 5th M.I. As they topped the ridge the lead horses were shot down; there was no choice of position, and the guns had to fight where they stood or withdraw, an alternative which allowed but one answer from the British artillery. They became exposed at once to rifle fire at 300 yards, and in particular to the attentions of three snipers who had sought refuge in a pigstye close up to Lean's position. The garden walls behind which most of the Boers had taken shelter were three and a half feet high, affording excellent protection against rifle fire; the bank of a small dam adjoining was also occupied, while a few men held a white house a little further in rear, and from all these points a rapid and accurate fire now broke out against the small body of British troops. These, however, were slowly growing in number. To the left of the 5th M.I. the Suffolk and West Riding detachments of the 8th M.I., under Captain Peebles and Lieutenant White, supported by another gun of "U" Battery under Captain Mair, now came up and worked round the right flank of the enemy, while 42 men of the 17th and 18th Companies of Yeomanry, under Captain Coates and Lieutenant Boulton, protected the right of the guns and were also warmly engaged.

Opening of the fight.

Le Gallais, who had quickly appeared on the scene, had gone down to the red farm. Noticing that many Boers who had fled at the first alarm were returning and endeavouring to work round his left, he directed Major Hickie, his staff officer, to ride back to the heliograph and order Major Welsh, who was in charge of the baggage escort, to park his convoy and bring every available man to the left flank. Le Gallais and Colonel Ross now entered the farm-house.

Le Gallais mortally wounded.

* Suffolks, Oxfordshire L.I., and West Riding Regiment.

Unfortunately, through the open door the interior of the house was clearly visible to the Boers lining the eastern angle of the garden, only 120 yards distant. Every figure within presented a conspicuous target, and very soon after Le Gallais had entered the house, this gallant and capable leader fell mortally wounded, while Ross was dangerously hit in two places, Captain Williams killed, and Lieutenant Percy Smith and several men wounded. Captain Engelbach, who, with 20 men of the Worcesters and Royal Irish Regt., held the low wall adjoining the farm, was also killed, and Colvile, in the stone kraal, was wounded, his place being taken by Captain Maurice. Despite these serious losses, the British troops, inspired by the sight of the Boer guns almost within their grasp, maintained their position with the greatest tenacity. The closeness of the fighting and the severity of the fire had made it impossible for the Boers to bring forward their superior artillery. One gun only was brought into action for a few minutes and then the attempt was abandoned. On the other hand, serious danger threatened from the Boers who had galloped off the field on the first alarm. Many of these, rallied by de Wet, and realising the weakness of the British force, were coming back and pressing round the flanks, rendering the situation of the 170 British soldiers on the field extremely critical. On the left, in particular, the Boers pressed hard. Mair's gun, exposed in the open, was put out of action and only saved from capture by the exertions of Peebles and the Suffolk M.I.

Other casualties.

Boer counter-attack.

De Lisle reinforces.

Major P. B. Taylor, commanding "U" Battery, having seen his guns into action, had gone off to join Le Gallais at the red farm, and, on the fall of his leader and of Colonel Ross, assumed control as next senior officer. Taylor at once sent off another messenger to reiterate the demand for reinforcements, and in the meantime, ably seconded by Major Hickie, who returned to the farm through a storm of bullets, directed the action with pluck and energy. An hour after the fight had begun, and not a moment too soon, reinforcements began to arrive. Knox at his camp on Eland's Vlei, ten miles north of Bothaville, had heard overnight of Le Gallais's fight at the river, and at 5 A.M. had

started south with De Lisle's column. Soon afterwards Le Gallais's guns were heard in action. De Lisle at once galloped forward at top speed, followed by every man who could hold the pace. At the drift close to Bothaville he received the message for help, and promptly forwarded assistance. Le Gallais's own reserve, the 7th Corps M.I., under Major Welsh, was just preparing to advance, and of this corps he sent two companies, under Major Copeman and Captain Luard, against the right of the Boer enveloping movement, and Colonel Knight with some New South Wales M.R. against the left. Shortly afterwards, while Knox remained at the drift to bring up the rest of the column, De Lisle, at Knox's request, galloped forward with Welsh and the rest of the 7th M.I., together with the fourth gun of "U" Battery and a pom-pom, and assumed control of the action.

De Lisle assumes command.

The reinforcements already on the spot had sensibly relieved the pressure on right and left, but the situation was still critical. After a perilous visit to the fatal farm, already a death-trap for so many brave men and still covering Percy Smith and his brave handful, De Lisle took a cool grasp of the position and, with the aid of Taylor and Hickie, made his arrangements. The fourth gun of "U" Battery and the pom-pom, supported by the New South Wales detachment, took post on the British left and fired on the white house and the garden, while Major Welsh was directed to take charge of a turning movement which was to start from the left, drive off the Boers from the south of the laager, and working round to the British right, take the defenders of the garden and laager in reverse. Welsh gathered most of the 7th M.I., including the detachments of Copeman and Luard, and adding some of the outlying men of the 8th M.I. under Peebles, began the task with spirit. Meanwhile Knox was sending up further small reinforcements from the drift. First Kitchener's Horse, then the West Australian M.I., then the 6th M.I., appeared on the field and were distributed around the west and south of the central Boer position. Finally at 9.30 the last unit of De Lisle's column, a reserve of 80 West Australians under Lieutenant Darling, was called up and

thrown into line with the 5th M.I. who, under Major Lean, were still fighting at close quarters with the defenders of the garden and laager. De Lisle now realised that the time had come for a decisive assault. The Boer counter-attack had been beaten off; the brave burghers in the garden and laager, deserted by their comrades, were suffering heavily under concentrated rifle and shell-fire, and although Welsh himself had fallen mortally wounded and Peebles had been killed, the turning force had made its appearance on the rising ground overlooking the laager from the west. At De Lisle's orders Lean collected a storming party of the 5th M.I. and Darling's West Australians, and ordered a charge with the bayonet. But at the first flash of the steel a white flag went fluttering up, and amid the shouts of the victors, the Boers held up their hands and surrendered.

Final assault ordered.

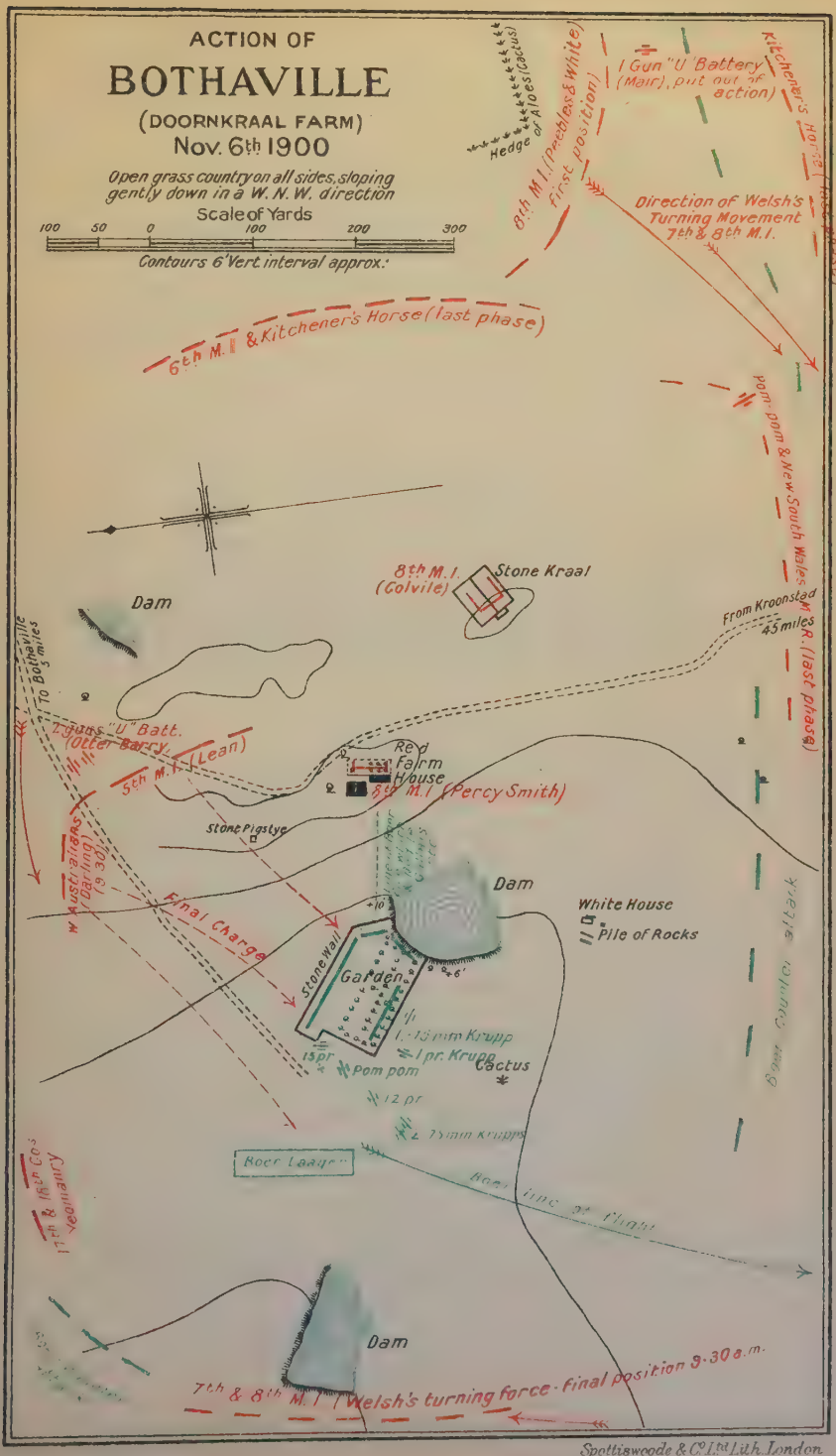
The Boers surrender.

De Wet and Steyn, now in rapid flight with their main body, had lost nearly everything they possessed. The whole of the artillery was captured, including three 75mm. Krupp guns, one Krupp 1-pounder, one Maxim, one pom-pom, one 15-pounder captured at Colenso, and one 12-pounder captured at Sannah's Post. All the wagons were taken, with a large supply of gun and small-arm ammunition, and a great quantity of saddlery and clothing. Seventeen Boers were buried on the field and seventeen wounded prisoners taken, besides ninety-seven unwounded. Le Gallais expired at 8.30 in the evening, happy in the thought of the victory, won at the cost of 38 killed and wounded, of whom ten were officers.

Results of the victory.

Knox generously disclaimed all credit for the action; but, if he was not present on the actual scene, it was due to his dispositions that the columns were so placed as to be able to seize their opportunity. That the opportunity was seized so well was due to the enterprise of Le Gallais, who stuck to the trail of an enemy whom he knew to be far superior in strength; to the dash of Kenneth Lean and the 5th M.I., without whose brilliant opening of the fight the success could never have been achieved; to the cool and rapid judgment of De Lisle; and last, but not least, to the splendid fighting qualities of all ranks on the field.

Comments on the action.


ACTION OF
BOTHAVILLE
(DOORNKRAAL FARM)
Nov. 6th 1900
Open grass country on all sides, sloping gently down in a W. N. W. direction
Scale of Yards
100 50 0 100 200 300
Contours 6' Vert. interval approx.
Hedge of Aloes (Cactus)
8th M.I. (Peebles & White) first position)
1 Gun "U" Battery (Mair), put out of action)
Kitchener's Horse (last phase)
Direction of Welsh's Turning Movement 7th & 8th M.I.
6th M.I. & Kitchener's Horse (last phase)
Pom-pom & New South Wales M.R. (last phase)
8th M.I. (Colvile)
Stone Kraal
Dam
From Kroonstad 45 miles
To Bothaville 5 miles
2 guns "U" Batt. (Otter Barry)
5th M.I. (Lean)
Red Farm House
8th M.I. (Percy Smith)
Stone Pigstye
W. Australians (Darling) (9.30)
Final Charge
Dam
White House
Pile of Rocks
Stone Wall
Garden
1.-15 mm Krupp
1 pr. Krupp
15 pr
Pom pom
Cactus
12 pr
Boer Laager
Boer line of flight
17th & 18th Co's Yeomanry
Dam
7th & 8th M.I. (Welsh's turning force - final position 9.30 a.m.
Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

Bothaville was a brilliant tactical success, but a deeper insight into the character of the war might have tempered the British triumph. There was no pursuit, and touch with de Wet was again lost. It was yet to be learnt, moreover, that in the guerilla campaign of the future, the capture of guns and supplies was of very secondary importance. High mobility, skill with the rifle, and the will to resist incarnate in the persons of their leaders, these were the real sources from which the Boers drew their strength.

IV

Growth of the Guerilla Spirit

Boer resilience.

Few who had witnessed the rout of de Wet at Bothaville before a handful of mounted infantry, would have believed it possible that within little more than a fortnight the same man would be capable of taking by open assault an intrenched British garrison of 450 men. Yet this was what happened.

De Wet collects a new force, Nov. 10–16.

Although he had not resigned the plan concerted with Steyn, de Wet could accomplish nothing with the force that escaped from Bothaville. The horses were unfit for the field, many of his burghers were without saddles, there was little ammunition, and, for the moment, neither wagons nor guns. Froneman, therefore, and the burghers of Vrede and Heilbron, were sent off to recuperate on the farms of the north-east, while de Wet and Steyn, with 200 men under Commandants Lategan and Jan Theron, crossed the railway near Doorn Spruit on the night of November 10, wrecking the line on their passage. Joined at the Doornberg by Commandant Haasbroek and the Winburg commando, and a few days later by Philip Botha and the commandos of Harrismith and Kroonstad, de Wet, once more in command of a well-mounted force of 1,500 men, decided that the moment had arrived for his inroad into Cape Colony.

Review of events, Oct.–Nov.

Before describing the expedition we must turn aside to cast another glance upon the general conditions of the Free

State. During October and the first half of November, no further progress had been made in the pacification of the new Colony. Except at Bothaville no serious blow had been struck at the burghers in arms. On the contrary, the system of many scattered garrisons had been extended, and although many of these garrisons were strongly held, others were so weak that they offered continual temptation to the roving bands which now infested the whole countryside. The so-called mobile columns were used mainly for escorting enormous convoys of provisions to the larger garrisons or for hastening, with what speed they might, to the succour of small beleaguered posts. Engaged thus upon operations which were, in the main, of a defensive character, they had neither leisure nor opportunity to undertake the main purpose of war, the pursuit and annihilation of the enemy's forces. Although Knox in the north-west and, on a smaller scale, White, Barker, and eventually Herbert in the south-east, had now been provided with forces of a mobile character, the greater number of the columns which paraded the country were still mainly composed of infantry. The solitary advantage of these solemn processions over the country was that they kept the men in good health.

Multiplication of garrisons.

So many troops had been required for the grand advance in the Transvaal, that at this period a wide area of the southern Free State was very lightly held, and it was against the small British garrisons in this quarter that the main efforts of the Free Staters were directed during October. In other quarters the Boer leaders, while keeping out of harm's way, watched every garrison and every column with a strong body of scouts, and rendered the roads unsafe throughout the length and breadth of the land. Hertzog, Fourie and Badenhorst, in the south-west, south-east, and west respectively, held the field with steadily increasing contingents. In Rundle's district there were some 2,500 burghers under arms, of whom the largest gathering was 700 strong under M. Prinsloo in the Bethlehem district. Philip Botha had 400 at call on the Witkopjes; Wessels 600 between Reitz and the Wilge, and other groups of varying strength were scattered over the mountains which girdle the Brandwater

Growth of the guerilla spirit.

Basin. These bodies were composed of local men knowing the country like the palms of their hands and quite content to remain on commando so long as they were not required to move out of the vicinity of their own homes. Some, whose farms had been burnt, found a roving life of adventure, with free living on the best of the land and the occasional excitement of shooting at khaki soldiers from a safe distance, a new and pleasurable form of existence, involving neither sustained effort nor excessive danger. When, however, they were invited by de Wet to join in the raid upon Cape Colony, the suggestion fell on unwilling ears, and only a relatively small proportion prepared to obey the summons. It was this spirit of local patriotism which was at once the strength and the weakness of the Boers. It enabled the guerilla war to be waged with so much local success and for so long; but it placed a heavy burden upon those leaders who were endeavouring to arouse the people to the need for more concerted action.

Local patriotism.

Briefly, the operations of the British columns during October and November were as follows. In the north-east Rundle, with the 17th Brigade and Campbell's 16th Brigade, marched in the last week of October from Bethlehem to Harrismith, having on his way a smart fight with Prinsloo, in which all ranks distinguished themselves. Rundle now made Harrismith his permanent headquarters, and at the same time established strong posts at Frankfort, Vrede, Reitz and Bethlehem, all of which places fell immediately into a state of semi-siege, while the columns which supplied them with provisions were constantly attacked. To the west of Rundle's sphere Bruce Hamilton's 21st Brigade spent October in ravaging the country from Lindley, where a garrison was established, westward to Bothaville, and during November made expeditions to Heilbron, Frankfort and the neighbouring districts. General Settle's column of 1,500 infantry under Colonel Galloway, and 500 mounted troops under Sir Charles Parsons, operated in the north-west, first on the north and later on the south side of the Vaal. On October 18 Settle was at Bloemhof, a week later at Hoopstad, and at the end of the month at Boshof, where we

British operations, Oct.–Nov.

shall shortly hear of him again.* In the south-east Major-General Ralph Allen relieved the small garrison of Wepener on October 8, and on the 19th, after a visit to Dewetsdorp, where Major Massy, R.A., was left in command of a garrison, Allen was sent to Springfontein to take charge of the southern section of the line of communications.

The Highland Brigade.

Hector MacDonald and the Highland Brigade were at Kroonstad on October 3rd. From here the Black Watch and Highland Light Infantry were transferred by train to Bloemfontein; and on the 8th the remainder of the column reached Smaldeel, whence MacDonald sent a small force † to relieve the garrison of Bultfontein. Early in November the Highland Brigade was broken up among a number of small garrisons in the southern part of the Colony, and MacDonald himself succeeded Allen, who was invalided home, in the command of the southern district. It had been Lord Roberts's intention that the Guards' Brigade should return home, but the movement of the troops had hardly begun before circumstances interfered to require their retention. On November 17, after a number of purposeless movements and contradictory orders, the Guards' Brigade Staff, with the 1st Coldstreams and part of the 3rd Grenadiers were at Springfontein, the rest of the Grenadiers being with Herbert's column ‡ at Edenburg; while the 1st Scots Guards and 2nd Coldstreams, temporarily left behind in the Transvaal, eventually followed in the same direction.

The Guards' Brigade.

Boer attacks on southern garrisons, Oct. 16–26.

In the meantime the weakness of the little garrisons in the south-west had emboldened the local Boer leaders to make a simultaneous effort to capture them, and as a consequence a series of attacks were delivered between the 16th and 26th of October against Jagersfontein, Philippolis, Fauresmith, Jacobsdal and Koffyfontein.

* It is no disparagement to Settle, who worked hard and well in relieving garrisons and destroying supplies, to say that his column was dubbed "Settle's Imperial Circus." The same humorous description would have applied to nearly all the unwieldy columns of this period.

† 140 Lovat's Scouts, four guns 82nd Battery, 300 Seaforth Highlanders.

‡ Herbert's column: 17th Lancers, 360; 1 sq. 9th Lancers, 100; 2 cos. 3rd Grenadiers, 140; 2 guns "R" Battery R.H.A.; 1 pom-pom, D sect.

Jagersfontein was defended by two companies of the Seaforth Highlanders, two guns, and 100 Town Guard and police, under the command of Major King-Hall. On the night of the 16th October some 25 Boers, aided by a number of the inhabitants, gained admission to the town and opened fire upon the reserve troops. After some confused fighting which cost the garrison 24 killed and wounded, the Boers and their friends retired with loss, but not before they had liberated all the prisoners in the gaol. At Fauresmith there stood a smaller garrison, consisting of 117 Seaforth Highlanders, 20 Imperial Yeomanry and a Town Guard of 17 men, the whole under Captain A. B. A. Stewart. Closely encircled on three sides by hills, which are themselves commanded by higher hills, Fauresmith was a difficult place to defend with such a weak force. Stewart wisely kept his Highlanders together on a kopje south of the town, while the Yeomanry under Lieutenant Richardson held a fort built of stones and sandbags on a low ridge to the north. At 4.15 A.M. on October 19 a determined attack was made, mainly against the Highlanders. All the troops held firm, and by 8.30, having inflicted nine casualties, the Boers drew off.

Jagersfontein, Oct. 16.

Fauresmith, Oct. 19.

Another plucky defence was that of Philippolis by Mr. Gostling, Resident Magistrate, with a little band of 18 British residents, 11 police, and 12 Afrikanders. He was assailed daily from the 18th to the 24th October, at first by 60 and finally by 200 Boers under Scheepers. Two small reinforcements, one of Nesbitt's Horse from Colesberg and another of cavalry details from Springfontein, which were sent to relieve the town, were both captured by the Boers. Nevertheless, skilfully intrenched on a kopje, Gostling held his own for a week, until White, summoned from Bethlehem, and Barker from Jagersfontein, both covering fifty miles in one day's hard marching, joined hands before the town on the evening of the 24th, and drove off the enemy. Nearly a third of the garrison had fallen by death or wounds. The story of Jacobsdal was one of carelessness as well as of bravery. Here were 45 Cape Town Highlanders, 8 police, and a 15-pounder, manned by some Colonial Volunteers.

Philippolis, Oct. 18–24.

Jacobsdal, Oct. 25.

The men were lodged partly under canvas on the market square, partly in houses near at hand. In the night of October 25, during a heavy storm of rain, 70 Boers crept up the bed of the Riet which runs through the town and gained some houses commanding the tents of the sleeping Volunteers. Opening fire at 3 A.M., they killed 14 and wounded 13 of the 34 men in the tents. Those in the buildings held out until a relief party of 54 men arrived from Modder River. On the next day the town was evacuated, only to be immediately reoccupied by the Boers. The last of this series of attacks was made upon Koffyfontein on October 26, but this important mining centre was resolutely held by Captain Robertson and a little body of miners and police until November 3, when Sir Charles Parsons, with Settle's mounted troops from Boshof, brought relief.

Koffyfontein, Oct. 26.

Further raids on the railway.

While every mobile column in the Free State was constantly opposed, while garrisons all over the country, from Vrede in the north to Philippolis in the south, were continually attacked, the Boers still found means for pursuing their depredations on the railway. The main line was broken up on no less than eighteen of the thirty nights of November. Thus, even on the central channel of communication, the preservation of which was vital to the success of British operations, the Boers were masters of the situation. Scarcely one of these attacks was resisted or even observed; for, although troops which might have been more profitably employed were constantly being diverted to strengthen posts on the railway, no system had yet been devised to safeguard the great arteries through which flowed the life-blood of the active forces in the field. The British, indeed, had lost their grip of the war, and the initiative had passed into the hands of roving partisans.

British situation in mid-November.

In the middle of November, when de Wet set out on his march to the south, circumstances seemed to have conspired to render his enterprise easy. Knox's force, which had defeated him at Bothaville a week ago, was refitting at Kroonstad, and on the 14th Colonel Pilcher, hitherto controlling the line of posts between Ladybrand and Thaba 'Nchu, succeeded to the command of Le Gallais's column. This appointment,

in other respects a good one, was most unhappily timed, since it removed this important line from the hands of a man who knew it by heart, only ten days before de Wet set out to cross it. Knox himself was at Pretoria reporting to Lord Roberts. Lord Kitchener, who was making distant visits to Natal and Harrismith, returned to Pretoria only on the 20th. The command at Bloemfontein had changed hands on the 5th, when Hunter succeeded Kelly-Kenny; while MacDonald in the southern district was also quite new to his responsibilities. Finally, the supreme command of the army laboured under the disadvantages inherent in the operation of "swapping horses while crossing a stream." Lord Roberts, on the point of returning home, had been forced to delay his departure by his daughter's serious illness at Pretoria, and had himself suffered some inconvenience by a fall from his horse. Busily engaged, throughout these personal anxieties, in clearing up a mass of accumulated work of all kinds, he had not been able for some weeks past to give that sustained attention to the military situation which the occasion urgently demanded.

De Wet's prospects.

In the whole of the central and southern districts of the Free State only the three weak columns of J. S. Barker, White and Herbert were really mobile. De Wet, on the other hand, had a good chance of steady reinforcement as he marched south. Various scattered bodies, under men like Kritzinger and Scheepers, were saving themselves for the attempt on Cape Colony, and de Wet relied on the active aid of these bodies as soon as he should appear with a strong force and a determination to cross the Orange at all costs In Cape Colony itself the situation was unusually serious. Extensive preparations were afoot for a Bond congress at Worcester on December 6, and all the leaders of the anti-British party had promised to attend a conference which might conceivably have ended in something more than disloyal talk had Steyn and de Wet with 2,000 men appeared on the scene to bring to a head all the bitterly hostile feeling and direct it with an iron hand. All the smouldering embers of disloyalty were being sedulously fanned into flame; every insidious lever for moving the sluggish nature of the

Dutch was resorted to at this moment by press, pulpit and platform to goad the Cape Colony into rebellion and bring upon the heads of the Cape Dutch the penalties of treason. The moment was not ill-chosen, and the ground was thoroughly prepared.

V

De Wet's Attempt to Invade Cape Colony

De Wet marches south, Nov. 13.

On November 13, a week after his defeat at Bothaville, de Wet, with 1,500 men and one Krupp gun, left the Doornberg; on the 14th he was at the Korannaberg, and at sunset on the 16th the British sentries saw and reported a strong column moving swiftly down upon Springhaan's Nek. The

Map, p. 42.

line of fortified posts between Thaba 'Nchu and Ladybrand, already in occupation for some months, had latterly been reinforced for the express purpose of preventing the passage of the enemy. In October the garrison had been increased to 1,000 infantry, 150 mounted infantry and several guns, which were now holding in force Thaba 'Nchu and Alexandria, linked up by a chain of small fortified posts about 2,000 yards apart. On the west, strong garrisons at the Waterworks and Bloemfontein, and, on the east, other detached posts stretching to the Basuto border, made a continuous line which appeared to be capable of constituting a barrier. But present and future events were to prove that, against mobile and determined forces, such barriers, however elaborate and complete, were nugatory. De Wet sent Philip Botha to engage two posts, and having thus diverted attention, set out at a gallop and, as twilight fell, raced through the Nek.

Nov. 16.

And invests Dewetsdorp, Nov. 21.

This first obstacle overcome, he rode south in leisurely fashion and, on the 18th, reconnoitred Dewetsdorp. Not only had he full information of the strength of the British garrison, but he was himself thoroughly acquainted with the locality, in which his own early years had been spent. The town had been named after his father by the Volksraad, and it was not without a certain sense of personal vanity that he

deliberated upon the attack. On the 19th he advanced during the day in full view of the town with the object of inducing the garrison to believe that no attack was intended; on the 20th he remained at Roodewal Farm well out of sight, and at dawn on the 21st he began the attack from three sides.

The position at Dewetsdorp.

The garrison of Dewetsdorp consisted of three companies of the 2nd Battalion of the Gloucester Regiment, one company of the Highland Light Infantry, 50 Mounted Infantry (Royal Irish Rifles and Gloucesters) a few police and other details, and two guns of the 68th Battery; in all 480 men, under the command of Major W. G. Massy, R.A. Dewetsdorp lies within a semicircle of steep, rocky hills, cleft by many deep gullies. To the north and north-east there is an open plain, but through this plain and directly towards the town runs a deep nullah affording ample shelter for the approach of mounted men. By concentrating his force on some compact position Massy might have defied attack for an indefinite time, but, with the object of holding the town itself and keeping the enemy out of it, he had taken up a position which was somewhat too extended for the troops at his disposal. The H.L.I. and the Royal Irish Rifles M.I., 140 all told, held 1,500 yards of ground on a hill to the south-east of the town, with an observation post on a sharp peak named Lonely Kop a mile to the east, beyond an intervening valley. Another important outlying post was the Crow's Nest, situated on a terrace 60 yards below the principal trenches and commanding portions of the deep northern nullah alluded to above. There were other small posts to the south.

Map, p. 32.

Eastern position.

Main position.

To the west of the town was the main position. On an extensive and irregular group of hills, bounded on the south by a gully known as the water ravine, and pierced a little further to the north by another known as the town ravine, were the Gloucesters and the guns. The principal trenches of the Gloucesters were on two sharp spurs on either side of the town ravine and on a higher plateau to the west, while there was a semicircle of small posts to the north and north-west. The guns were planted

in gun-pits on the spur between the town ravine and the Reddersburg road.

Defences imperfect.

In addition to, and to a certain degree, in consequence of the undue size of Massy's position, the defences themselves were far from perfect. Typical of the system in vogue at the time, they consisted of a number of short lengths of shelter trench or sangar, sand-bagged and loop-holed, well placed to command the ground, but affording cover only to men kneeling or sitting, and without any means of intercommunication. In an attack the officers could not move about to encourage their men, who had to pass the day crouching behind their slight shelters, and often running short of food, water and ammunition. If under this demoralising system a corporal in command of a few men became alarmed by a few casualties and retired, the loss of his post allowed others to be enfiladed or taken in reverse, until the whole defence threatened to fall gradually to pieces.

De Wet's system of attack.

De Wet and Lategan conducted the attack on the Gloucester position; Philip Botha, with the help of a brave field-cornet named Wessel Wessels, who was destined later to attain to high command, assailed the H.L.I. position. To guard against interruption by British troops from one or more of the numerous garrisons in the vicinity, strong parties were sent out to watch Bloemfontein, Thaba 'Nchu, Wepener and Reddersburg; precautions which, as events showed, were needless. The attack was a signal example of what skilled riflemen, utilising every scrap of cover, and acting independently but to a common purpose, can accomplish against weak defences. Few attempts were made to rush posts by assault, and these few only by night or when the hostile fire had been to a great extent subdued. The far more subtle and demoralising procedure was adopted of stealthy progress from cover to cover, an art in which the Boers had no rivals. The garrison, indeed, was fairly shot out of its positions by the superior field-craft and marksmanship of the foe.

A Cossack post had been taken on the night of the 20th, and early on the 21st the Boers worked their way up to both sections of the defence, Wessels, on the east, capturing the small but important post on Lonely Kopje

held by seven Royal Irish Rifles. During the night another Cossack post on the Gloucester side fell, but on the morning of the 22nd it was the H.L.I. position on the south-east which was faring worst. At 8.30 the Crow's Nest, the only post which commanded the deep northern nullah, was evacuated after a not very spirited resistance. The post, like that on Lonely Kop, also commanded the valley between the Kop and the H.L.I. position. This valley was dead ground to the main trenches, which could now be surrounded and attacked at close range. In the evening Major Anson, commanding the H.L.I., reported that the position was untenable, and in the night it was evacuated, and the whole force concentrated in the Gloucester position to the west of the town. But this was a move which had never been contemplated. There was not enough trench accommodation, and too few picks and shovels. The result, on the morning of the 22nd, was a weakness disproportionate to the numbers engaged, and some confusion. Lieutenant Alston, with 30 men, reinforced the Maxim post of the Gloucesters; Major Anson, with 40 men, held an exposed crest-line north of the water ravine, but another party which was intended to follow him crowded into No. 1 gun-pit, where there was too little room for them. The day opened badly by the capture, while it was still dark, after stout resistance and heavy loss, of an outlying Gloucester trench north of the town ravine, whence a plunging fire could be directed by the Boers on the main position. It illustrates the disconnected character of the defences that this capture was not even known at headquarters until five hours later, when a hot and determined attack was made from all sides. The Boer Krupp, hitherto employed on the west, where it was several times silenced, now opened fire from Lonely Kop. In the course of the day the water supply, drawn from the water ravine, was captured, and ammunition ran low, but most of the defences were still intact. The losses so far were by no means excessive, and there was certainly no necessity for immediate surrender. Unhappily, owing to the unwarrantable conduct of an infantry subaltern in No. 1 gun-pit, a white flag was raised at 4 P.M. It was ordered down,

The Crow's Nest taken 8.30 A.M., Nov. 21.

Evacuation of the H.L.I. position, night of Nov. 21.

but an hour later, on an absurd report (again owing to the absolute isolation of the various posts) that the wounded in the gun-pit were being killed by the Boers, it was re-hoisted. This time it received recognition, and the whole force surrendered. The losses had been 14 killed and 52 wounded, together with 30 slightly wounded, who were able to march away with the prisoners.

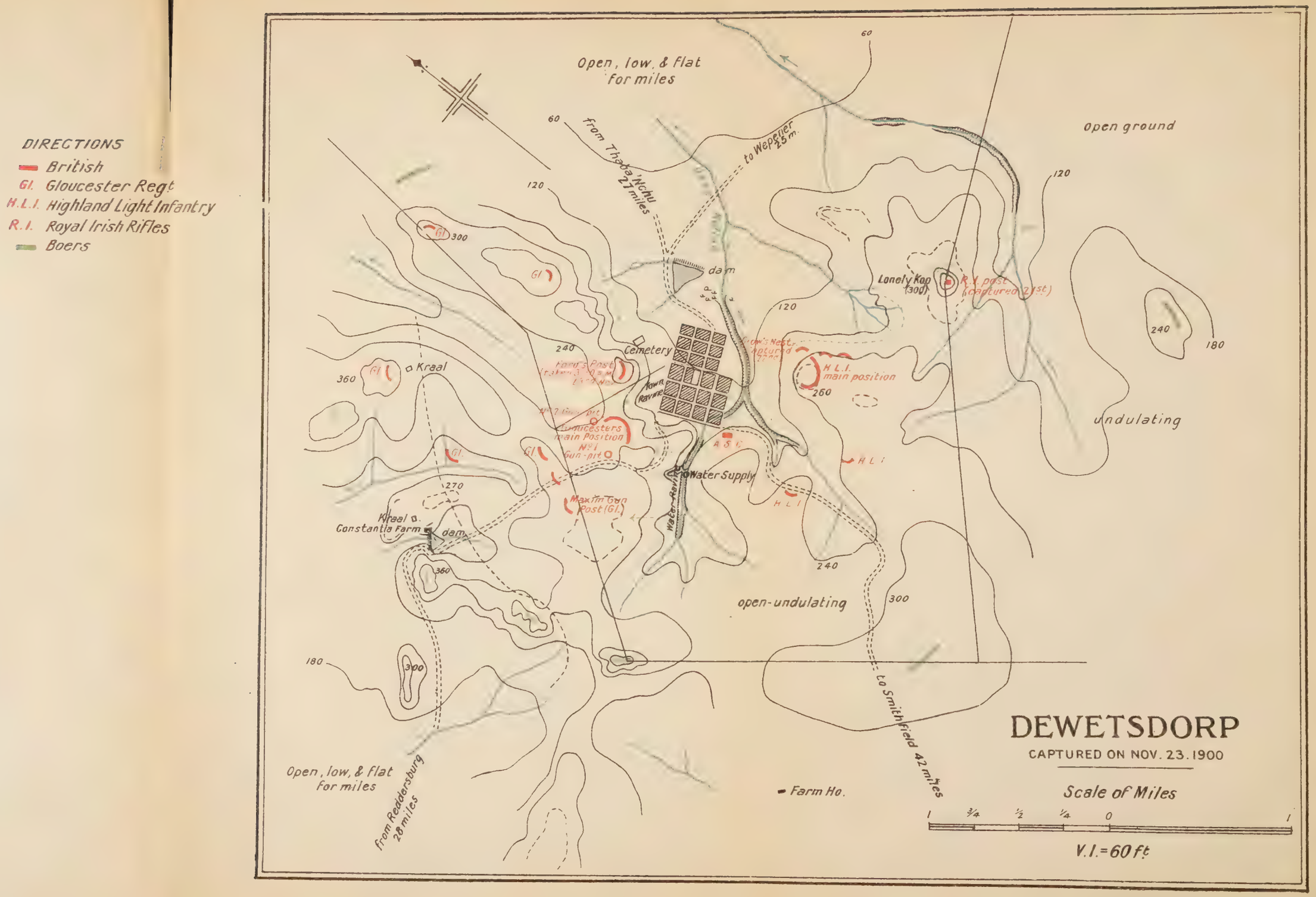
The force surrenders.

Comments on Dewetsdorp.

The lesson of Dewetsdorp is one for the British Army to remember. The art of fortification was little understood by the defenders, who in six weeks had constructed defences about as formidable as Woodgate's men had carved out of the rock at the summit of Spion Kop in four hours' toil during the night. These defences, moreover, had been officially inspected and approved by officers superior to Massy. At the same time, greatly superior in strength as the Boers were, it is not possible to withhold admiration from a skilful feat of arms by which a British garrison, of no mean strength and with superior artillery, was thus snapped up after several days of siege in the very midst of a circle of friendly posts. The defects of the system of fortification in general use at this time were beginning, fortunately, to be realised. Now that the Boers were so weak in artillery, the system of trenches and sangars was obsolete. A few strong redoubts, requiring comparatively few men, were far more effective. Winburg, fortified a little later by Colonel J. S. Barker, was a good example of this method.

Despatch of a relief column.

Could Dewetsdorp have been relieved by some of the numerous British forces in the vicinity? It was known on the evening of the 16th that a large force had broken through the Thaba 'Nchu line heading south towards Dewetsdorp, and the attack on the town was universally known as soon as it began. Dewetsdorp is 25 miles from Wepener, 30 from Reddersburg, 28 from Thaba 'Nchu, 40 from Bloemfontein, and 47 from Edenburg, and at all these places there were British garrisons. Yet from only one of these points, and that the most distant of all—namely, Edenburg, where MacDonald commanded—was any effort made to avert the disaster, and even this effort was too feeble and too late. It was not until 1 P.M. on the 22nd that Barker's and


DIRECTIONS
British
Gl. Gloucester Regt
H.L.I. Highland Light Infantry
R.I. Royal Irish Rifles
Boers
Open, low, & flat for miles
from Thaba 'Nchu 27 miles
to Wepener 25 m.
Open ground
Lonely Kop (300)
R.I. post (captured 21st)
dam
Cemetery
Town Ravine
Kraal
Gl.
Gloucesters main Position No 1 Gun-pit
Maxim Gun Post (Gl.)
Water Supply
Water Ravine
H.L.I. main position
H.L.I.
A.S.C.
Kraal
Constantia Farm
dam
undulating
open-undulating
to Smithfield 42 miles
Farm Ho.
Open, low, & flat for miles
from Reddersburg 28 miles
DEWETSDORP
CAPTURED ON NOV. 23. 1900
Scale of Miles
1 3/4 1/2 1/4 0 1
V.I. = 60 ft

Herbert's columns, with a combined strength in mounted men of 868, were despatched by Hunter. Barker suggested more than once that, as time was an object, the convoy which he was ordered to conduct to Dewetsdorp should be left behind, but MacDonald would not agree to this. Moving as fast as he could, Barker reached the neighbourhood of Dewetsdorp at 10 A.M. on the 24th, and found the enemy strongly posted on hills to the west of the town. Parking his wagons, Barker boldly engaged them, but, finding himself outnumbered, outflanked, and attacked in rear, was unable to do more than maintain his position. His runners, sent in to communicate with the garrison, failed to get through, and it was not till the afternoon of the 25th that some 15-pounder shells picked up on the field gave the first indication that the town had fallen.

Barker marches, Oct. 22.

When Lord Roberts heard that de Wet had broken through the Thaba 'Nchu line, he at once sent back Knox from Pretoria to assume command of the three columns under Pilcher, Herbert and Barker, with orders to follow and engage de Wet wherever found. But Knox was in no situation to save Dewetsdorp. Pilcher, at Kroonstad, was 160 miles from Edenburg, which had been assigned as his point of concentration, and he was ordered to entrain and proceed by rail to the south only on the night of the 19th. On the 20th but two trains could be provided, and the last of the twelve trains required to convey his 762 men, 829 horses, and four guns, reached Edenburg only at 9 A.M. on the 25th. At 2.30 P.M. the column started, accompanied by Knox, and on the 26th arrived at Oorlog's Poort, where the news of the surrender reached them through Barker. De Wet had remained in front of Barker on the 24th and 25th, but, hearing of the march of reinforcements, trekked away on the night of the 25th, leaving only a small rearguard to act as a blind. With him he took the prisoners of Dewetsdorp, who, throughout all the long and trying marches which followed, were forced to travel on foot, their officers refusing the offer of wagons, in order to share the hardships of their men.

Knox sent down from Pretoria.

The pursuit of de Wet now began in earnest. On the

Knox pursues, Nov. 27.

27th Knox marched at 5.30 A.M. towards Helvetia, and an hour or more after starting came into collision with the enemy near Vaalbank. De Wet and Steyn, after a long night march, were breakfasting in a farm and their men were in a bad position. Pilcher, who had pushed on at a hand gallop, brought 300 men and some guns into action, and de Wet's burghers, with Bothaville in their recollection, made off after a very poor resistance. Barker and Herbert had been ordered to join the column at Helvetia, but no hour having been named for their start, they moved off very late and reached Helvetia only at 5 P.M., too late to take any serious part in the action. Shaking himself free of Pilcher and doubling sharply to the west, de Wet proceeded to Hex Rivier Berg and across the sources of the Riet, and marching thence by Treur Kop, arrived on December 2 at Tafel Kop, twelve miles north of Bethulie.

Map, p. 42.

De Wet flees south.

Knox had lost touch, but in the conviction that his enemy's destination was Cape Colony, he headed due south with a view of forestalling de Wet on the Orange River. On the 28th he was at Smithfield, and on the 30th, marching south-west along the right bank of the Caledon, he arrived at its junction with the Slik Spruit. On December 1 he took Pilcher and Barker into Bethulie to fill up with supplies, and left Herbert near the Slik Spruit. De Wet, whose whereabouts had been unknown for five days, now suddenly made his appearance, and on the 2nd attacked Herbert at Goed Hoop. He had been strongly reinforced. Captain Pretorius, with several hundred men from the Fauresmith and Philippolis districts had joined him on the 29th, General Piet Fourie and Captain Scheepers, with local detachments, had come in on the 30th, so that the Free State force was now 2,500 strong and excellently mounted. Horses had been collected from all the neighbouring farms, and every one of de Wet's burghers had at least two, and some of them five spare mounts, under the charge of Kaffirs. It might have gone hard with Herbert had not Knox promptly sent reinforcements. Barker, despatched from Bethulie, reached the field in time to support Herbert, and

Dec. 1.

But is reinforced and attacks Herbert.

Herbert is reinforced. Action of Goed Hoop, Dec. 2–3.

was followed by a small column* of 400 mounted men under Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Williams which had joined Knox in the course of the day. Pilcher, however, was not at hand. Having been promised reinforcements from Springfontein, he had marched west to meet them, and returned only on the 3rd. Fortunately de Wet's attack was, at first, not formidable, but on the 3rd, when he resumed the fight with the whole of his strength, the British, with Herbert in the centre and Barker and Williams on either flank, became engaged on a wide front. Pilcher—still without his reinforcements—heard from Knox at 11.30 A.M. of the position of the affairs at Goed Hoop, and was urged to endeavour to get behind the enemy. When he reached the battlefield, with only 300 rifles and four guns, Pilcher was not strong enough to press home an attack, but the direction of his march greatly alarmed the Boers, who broke off the action and retreated precipitately.

Hertzog and de Wet frame their scheme, Dec. 3.

Just before this Hertzog had joined de Wet, and the two men had agreed that the former should make an inroad into Cape Colony between Norval's Pont and Hopetown, while the latter crossed between Bethulie and Aliwal North. Hertzog was then to operate in the western districts of Cape Colony, and de Wet in the eastern and midland districts. De Wet now set out upon one of those fine marches with which, as yet, the British columns were hardly able to compete. On the afternoon of the 3rd, in pouring rain, he began a circuitous march of twenty-seven hours, and reached Karee Poort on the Caledon River at 7 P.M. on the 4th. Knox, temporarily outwitted, marched to Klipfontein in the belief that de Wet had gone north, but, finding that his foe had doubled east and then south on a right-handed circle, he turned to follow the new scent and on the evening of the 4th reached Carmel. On this day Pilcher was joined by his reinforcements, in the shape of 500 of the 5th and 7th M.I., which brought up his strength to 1,000 mounted men and 6 guns; while Barker, on the 3rd, had been reinforced by Strathcona's Horse.

De Wet marches on, Dec. 3 (p.m.).

* 1st Mounted Infantry, 412 all ranks; four guns 85th Battery; 4 howitzers. (Two guns were transferred to Herbert and two howitzers to Barker.)

The Guards line the Orange, Nov. 21–Dec. 5.

It has been noticed that the leading battalions of the Guards Brigade had reached Springfontein on November 17. When the direction and object of de Wet's march became apparent, urgent messages were received from Lord Roberts to hasten the march of the Guards to the south of the Orange River, and on the 19th two columns, each with twenty-five days' supplies for the posts they were required to find, set out for Bethulie and Norval's Pont respectively. On the 21st the Grenadier companies were detailed to watch the drifts to the west of Norval's Pont and the Coldstreamers those to the east, but it was not till December 5 that the 1st Scots Guards arrived at Bethulie, whence most of the companies were sent on to Albert Junction.

A flood in the Orange stops de Wet, Dec. 5.

Although at the end of November the Orange River had been passable in many places, the heavy rains which had begun locally on December 2 and still earlier in the upper reaches now caused a sudden and a rapid rise and changed the whole aspect of the situation. De Wet, abandoning his Krupp gun, had crossed the Caledon with difficulty, but when, on the evening of the 5th, he reached the Orange near Odendal Stroom, he found the river in raging flood and the Coldstreams posted on the southern bank. Failure stared him in the face. The bridge at Aliwal North he knew to be strongly held; to wait till the flood subsided was out of the question; to carry his force through hostile Basutoland was equally out of the question. To retreat was the only course, but even retreat was hazardous, for behind him lay the Caledon, also in high flood. Pent between two swollen rivers, with the one bridge over the Caledon, for aught he knew, already held, de Wet's situation was not enviable.

He decides to retreat, Dec 6.

But it was no use hesitating. On the 6th he marched east for a short way, in order to confuse his pursuers, and then north for Commissie Bridge. He had not, however, abandoned his ulterior design. Hertzog, as we have seen, had already set out to invade western Cape Colony; and Kritzinger and Scheepers, two young leaders of consummate skill and daring, were now left behind with small detachments, under orders to seek the first opportunity for crossing the river higher up and invading the eastern and

midland districts. Right well, as we shall see later, did they perform their task.

Knox, unaware of the change, still pursues south, Dec. 5-6.

Knox, meanwhile, unaware of this change of plan, was hurrying south on a scent two days old. On the 5th he had reached Karee Poort, where he found the Caledon flooded, but managed to get Williams across with his guns and Cape carts, leaving the remainder of the force on the northern bank. On the 6th, Barker and Strathcona's Horse having followed, the whole force marched for Odendal Stroom. An hour after starting, news was received that the Caledon had risen again and that all the transport was cut off. Knox, therefore, directed it upon Smithfield, and, regardless of his lack of supplies, pushed on.

The paramount importance of heading de Wet, should he succeed in crossing the Orange, now caused a move to be ordered which the information, so far as it went, justified, but which deprived Knox of two of his columns for a considerable period. Pilcher and Herbert, united under the command of Colonel Long, R.A., were sent to Bethulie on the 6th, and thence despatched on a fruitless mission south of the river to Aliwal North. Knox, with the rest of his force, reached Odendal Stroom at 8 A.M. on the 6th, and was at once informed that de Wet had gone east. He hastened on therefore as far as Kromdraai on the Sand River Spruit, where the column halted for the night. Hundreds of abandoned Boer horses had been found scattered over the veld in every stage of exhaustion.

De Wet is baffled at the Caledon, Dec. 7.

When de Wet, on the 6th, headed for the Caledon, he sent on 300 men in advance to reconnoitre Commissie Bridge and endeavour to secure a passage. Here stood a brave little party of forty Highland Light Infantry under a resolute young officer, Lieutenant D. A. Blair. Returning a sarcastic answer to a summons for surrender, Blair opened fire and drove off the commando. On the morning of the 7th de Wet himself arrived with the main body, and, bringing up the Dewetsdorp 15-pounders, shelled the defences on both banks, while many burghers worked their way along the river bank both up and down stream. It was in vain. The gallant little garrison presented unflinching opposition, and in the

But crosses higher up, Dec. 7.

afternoon de Wet's whole force, baffled by this Lilliputian foe, trekked up-stream and eventually effected a crossing at Swanepoe's Farm, though the water, during the passage, was so deep as to cover the guns completely. The same night, with his horses utterly exhausted by rapid marching over muddy roads, de Wet laagered at Dr. Lantre's Farm and had two clear days' rest, during which he was joined by Haasbroek and the Winburg commando. On the 10th he marched north to Helvetia. Colonel Garland, commanding the small infantry garrison at Smithfield, had heard of his presence at Lantre's Farm and sent runner after runner to Knox, but all were intercepted, and Knox himself was at this point unduly slow in his movements. He had reached Rouxville from Kromdraai on the 7th, rested there on the 8th, arrived at Commissie Bridge on the 9th and pushed on to Smithfield on the 10th. At Rouxville he had had to wait for supplies, but forty-five miles in four days was not quick enough going in the pursuit of a Boer force.

Knox is reinforced, Dec. 10.

At Smithfield Knox was joined by Colonel White's column of the 16th Lancers and Welsh Yeomanry, 300 mounted men in all, who had been sent round by rail from Edenburg to Bethulie; and on the same day the Commander-in-Chief's Bodyguard of 300 men under Colonel Laing also arrived and were attached to White's column.* Long's despatch on a false scent to the south bank of the Orange had been only partially repaired, for de Wet's detachment of Kritzinger and Scheepers had caused a fresh diversion. Long, on the 9th, had sent off Herbert's column and part of Brabant's Horse, under Colonel Grenfell, to deal with these leaders, and himself, with Pilcher and the rest of Brabant's Horse had hurried north by way of Rouxville, to

Kritzinger enters Cape Colony, Dec. 6.

overtake Knox. Kritzinger, we may say in parenthesis, struck sharply at the troops sent out to bar his path to the Colony. On the 13th at Koesberg, near Zastron, he ambuscaded and overwhelmed a party of 250 Brabant's Horse, killing or wounding twenty and taking 100 prisoners.

* White's column: 16th Lancers, 130; Welsh Yeomanry, 185; Commander-in-Chief's Bodyguard, 320; 1 pom-pom; 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, 150; 4 guns 74th and 76th Batteries.

Three days later he crossed the Orange and entered the Colony.

Hearing that de Wet was laagered at Helvetia, Knox, with Barker, Williams and White, and with Long some distance in rear, started north on the 11th. De Wet was now in a fresh quandary. On his right stood the Basuto mountains ; in rear were the British columns ; in front was the fortified Thaba 'Nchu—Ladybrand line. As the easiest way to slip out of the net he resolved to head west and cross the railway. When Knox reached the ridge overlooking Helvetia valley in the morning of the 11th, the whole of the Boer convoy, only three miles distant, burst into view moving west, while clouds of Boer horsemen were seen to be galloping up the slopes on either side of the valley in order to take position to check their foe. Knox pressed on, but the delays of a running fight enabled the Boer convoy to get away before it could be seriously assailed. Nevertheless, de Wet was not destined to break out to the west ; for the hand of Kitchener, now guiding the British movements, had already provided for this contingency. General Settle's mounted troops and other units, hastily formed into a column under Colonel Sir C. Parsons, had at the right moment been hurried to Reddersburg. Headed by these troops, the Boers doubled sharply and trekked away eastward.

De Wet's second quandary.

Informed of this move when near Reddersburg on the 12th, Knox wheeled, following the spoor of his elusive foe, and sighted him at 3 P.M. strongly posted on the Beyersberg. The bolder spirits of the British advanced guard had hoped for an immediate attack and were discouraged at the somewhat cautious advance in the afternoon. But Knox felt that with the Thaba 'Nchu line to the north now strongly reinforced and with Parsons ready to intervene from the west, his enemy could not escape him and that his chief duty was to advance with his troops well in hand. Even now, Long was still a march behind. On the 13th Knox reached Daspoort with some difficulty, and again found the Boers in position on a range of hills near Driefontein. De Wet's situation was critical. Piet Fourie was in favour of giving battle, de Wet in favour of retreat, and when the

Knox pursues to the north, Dec. 12–13.

news came in that troops were already strengthening the Thaba 'Nchu line his counsels prevailed. At night the Boer force marched silently north, covered thirty miles in the night by a fine effort of marching and reached the neighbourhood of Springhaan's Nek before dawn.

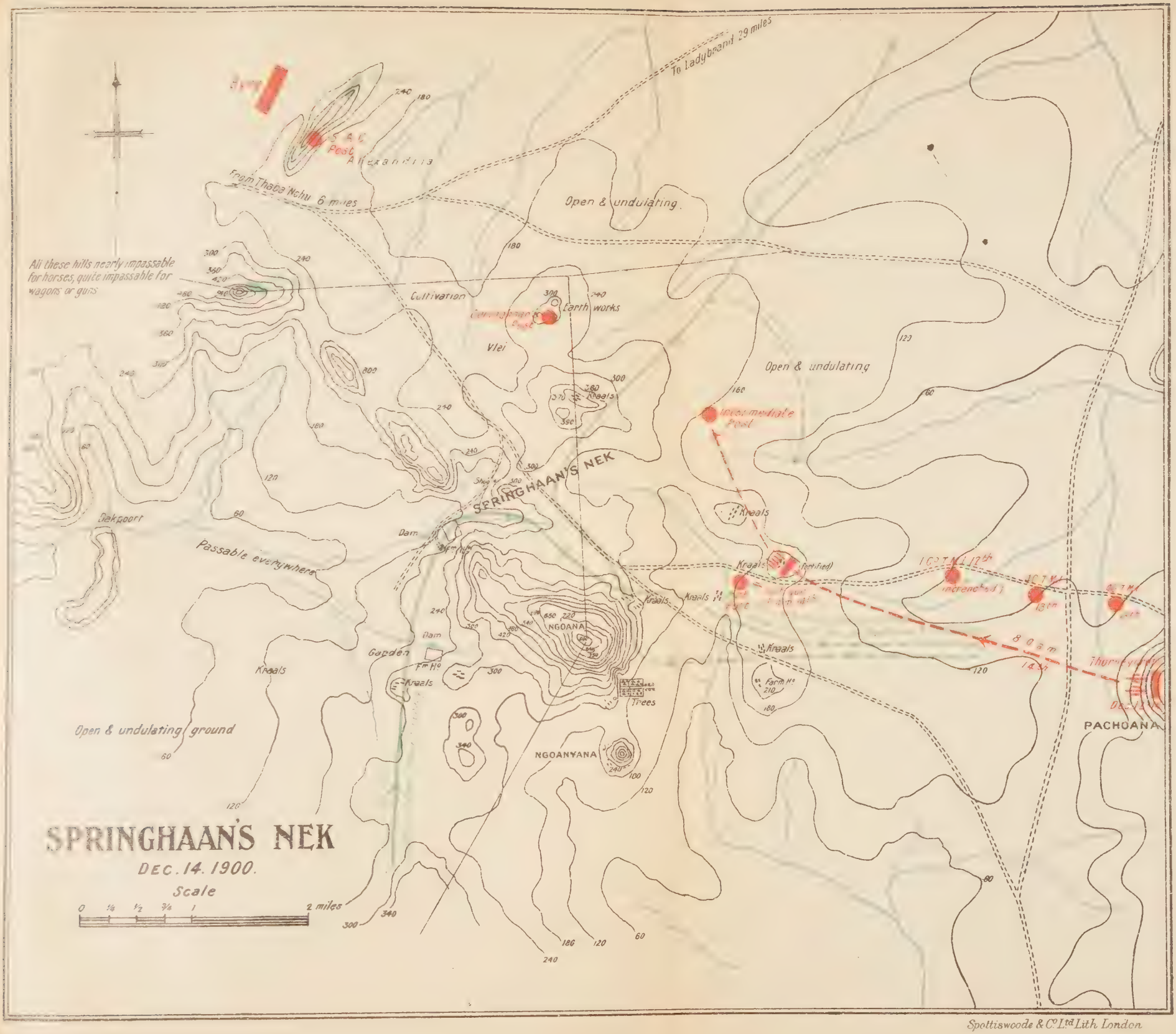
De Wet decides to force Springhaan's Nek, Dec. 14.

A month before, Colonel Tobin, commanding the Thaba 'Nchu—Ladybrand line, in the fear that Thaba 'Nchu would share the fate of Dewetsdorp, had transferred thither the garrisons of some of his minor posts, and among these was Bassett's Post at Springhaan's Nek. Thus, although the force guarding the line had been strengthened by the arrival of Colonel Thorneycroft's troops and 300 S.A. Light Horse under Colonel Byng, the cordon was not so strong as it might have been. De Wet, most opportunely, had been joined in the course of the night by Commandant Michal Prinsloo and 300 men of the Bethlehem commando. Prinsloo's horses being fresh, de Wet ordered him to lead the way. He was to pass through Springhaan's Nek before morning, occupy a position to the east of Thaba 'Nchu, engage the attention of the British posts and check the despatch of reinforcements. Prinsloo executed these instructions with great resolution and intelligence. At 2 A.M. the posts at Alexandria and Thaba 'Nchu were attacked, and before daylight Prinsloo, at the cost of two men killed, galloped through the line. This feat proved de Wet's salvation. Byng lay at Thaba 'Nchu during the night, Thorneycroft at Pachoana, with posts thrown out towards the Nek; it was known that a small force had slipped through, but the position of affairs was not for the moment clear. As dawn broke, however, the British posts observed Prinsloo's men, but they also saw the inspiring sight of an immense convoy, preceded and surrounded by swarms of Boers trekking at top speed towards the Nek. As soon as the leading Boers were within range, Thorneycroft's posts opened a rapid fire. The Boers wheeled in confusion and the convoy behind them came to a sudden halt. Then in great disorder it swerved away to the west.

Map, p. 40.

Knox hears of the move, Dec. 14.

At this moment, Knox, far away to the south, was just starting in pursuit; White, on the left, heading for Thaba



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by Knox, whose columns barely mustered as many rifles as the Boers.

Influence of Lord Kitchener.

It will have been observed that when de Wet first crossed the Thaba 'Nchu line on his march to the south the resistance he encountered was slight, but that as the days wore on a rising flood of horsemen took up the pursuit and pressed it with a vigour which was a revelation both to friends and foes. The mainspring of this new and formidable mechanism was Lord Kitchener. Lord Roberts having left Pretoria and handed over the supreme command on November 29, Kitchener had immediately mobilised his headquarters and dashed off to Bloemfontein, determined to throw the full weight of his personal energy into the southern campaign. To him was due the successive and opportune arrival of Williams, White, Laing, Parsons, Byng and Thorneycroft, brought up from all points of the compass and thrown into the fray with a full sense of the importance of checkmating de Wet. Called back to Pretoria on December 11, Kitchener was not able personally to supervise the final operations, but he had instilled a new spirit into their conduct.

We must now turn to the Transvaal and describe the situation which awaited him there.

CHAPTER II

THE AWAKENING IN THE TRANSVAAL

(September–November, 1900)

The organised Boer revival came later in the Transvaal.

In the Transvaal the organised Boer revival naturally came later than in the Orange Free State. It was on Transvaal soil that the last regular battles of the war were fought; and it was not till the end of September, when de Wet was already taking the field with the first genuine guerilla force, that the issue of these battles was decided and the regular Boer army finally dissolved.

Escape of the leaders and one organised force, Sept. 1900.

It was a very natural, but a very costly error by which, in the last stage of the advance, the main British energies were devoted to forcing a passage direct to the Portuguese border and not to the more important object of cutting the one line of retreat open to the one organised Boer force still in existence. This matter was dealt with in the last volume; * but it is necessary to remind the reader that in the middle of September Louis Botha, with the aid of Ben Viljoen, collected from the wrecks of the melting army 2,000 of the staunchest spirits in the Boer ranks, and, accompanied by Acting-President Schalk Burger and the members of the Transvaal Government, cut himself adrift from the railway, with all its attendant scenes of confusion and demoralisation, and marched north for Pietersburg. Though there was full warning of this important movement, and ample time to defeat it, Botha was allowed to effect his purpose almost unchallenged. He had, it is true, to divide his force, for the only direct route lay across the rugged heights of the Drakensberg, and Buller, who had garrisons from Machadodorp to Lydenburg and thence round to Spitz-

* See vol. iv. pp. 477–8.

kop, was closely threatening the one pass by which the Boers could cross the range. Botha, therefore, and the Government, together with a small escort, slipped across the pass just before it was blocked and reached Pietersburg early in October. Viljoen was left with the main body to execute an immense and laborious detour through the fever-stricken jungles of the low country, and so round the northern spurs of the mountains, by Leydsdorp and Agatha to Pietersburg, which he reached on October 19.

They reach Pietersburg,

Steyn and the Free State Government, who had made their dash for safety even earlier than Botha, were present here too. And now a still earlier defect in the British strategy, Carrington's failure to invade the Transvaal from the north, told its tale. Pietersburg and the surrounding districts, as far south as Pienaar's River Station, where the nearest British column was posted, were a secure retreat. Beyers, the leader whose courageous counsels had turned the scale in the dark hours which followed the capture of Pretoria, had retreated hither with the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos; Kemp, another and yet more ardent spirit, was present with the Krugersdorp commando; De la Rey, who had fallen back on his own country in the west, which was scarcely less secure, was within easy reach of communication; and thus both Governments and the most influential leaders of the Transvaal found leisure to rest both brain and body, to communicate with Europe and with distant parts of the two republics, and to make plans for a revival of the war. But it was not till the end of November that these plans matured, and in the meantime most districts were leaderless and their men deficient in enterprise. And yet, beneath the surface exactly the same tendencies were at work as in the Orange Free State. Many disheartened burghers had surrendered; but the great majority had jogged quietly back to their farms and resumed their normal avocations. Animated by the same spirit of local patriotism, they were quite ready to unite in small bodies for the opposition of hostile columns, for the worrying of convoys and for the wrecking of railways, though as yet there was no union of effort for any common purpose.

Which becomes the rallying-point and resting-place.

Elsewhere the burghers lack enterprise, but are animated by the same guerilla spirit as the Free Staters.

The British hold railway towns and little else.

The greater part of the British forces were disseminated along the lines of railway, which required an immense number of men for their protection. The system of garrisons initiated in the Free State at the end of August had been followed also in the Transvaal, but, owing to the lack of troops to occupy the large area theoretically under British control, it was found impracticable to do much more than hold the chief towns on the railways, and to organise columns at some of these points for the purpose of breaking up any bodies of the enemy which might concentrate within striking distance. The greater part of the territory and of its natural resources were still in the hands of the Boers. Vast districts remained where the invaders had never penetrated and where the burghers, with their families and belongings, found rest and sanctuary.

No change in the system of warfare.

As in the Free State, the British columns were still organised for regular war and still adhered rigidly to an already obsolete system. Although, in the aggregate, the number of mounted men was still inferior to that on the Boer side, there were mounted corps which, by constant service in the field, had been brought to a high state of efficiency, and there were many young leaders of horsemen who had proved their worth. The time, moreover, was rapidly approaching when the first period of service of many Colonials and Yeomen would expire. But no material change was introduced into the system of warfare; so that the greater part of the mounted men were still chained to ponderous columns of infantry and their activities restricted to what they could accomplish between daylight and dusk. The various commanders of divisions and districts claimed something of a vested interest in their mounted men, and the rigid traditions of a regular army prevented interference with the hide-bound rules of routine. Thus, at a highly critical period of the war, the Transvaal, like the Free State, was given the necessary respite to recuperate its strength.

The troops stand in seven main groups.

The general course of the war had automatically distributed the British forces in the Transvaal into seven main groups. (1) To guarantee security at Pretoria and Johannesburg an entire division of infantry was needed.

(2) To the east, Lyttelton, with the troops Buller had brought up from Natal and other forces accumulated during the eastern advance, held the Delagoa railway from the capital to Waterval Onder, while French still held Barberton and the remaining section of the railway. (3) To the south-east, Clery and Hildyard, with the old Second and Fifth Divisions of the Natal army, occupied Natal and the railway to Heidelberg. (4) West of Pretoria, Clements, Ridley, Broadwood and Cunningham operated in the Magaliesberg and the districts stretching to Rustenburg. (5) To the south-west, Hart and Barton held the railway to Klerksdorp, and were actively engaged in the neighbouring districts. (6) In the remotest west, Methuen at Mafeking and Settle further south had the difficult task of controlling an immense area of country with fewer troops and under greater difficulties of supply than in any other region. (7) Finally, to the north, Paget, with Plumer and Hickman, operated on the Pietersburg railway. We propose to survey in turn the history of these groups.

Pretoria and Johannesburg, Sept.–Nov.

At Pretoria and Johannesburg Tucker's Seventh Division has an uneventful story. The 14th Brigade held Pretoria and the 15th Johannesburg with a total effective strength, at the end of September, of 6,000 men and 32 guns; and at the end of October, of 5,000 men and 25 guns. But Alderson's Mounted Infantry, which was in course of organisation within the command, was making rapid progress, and by the 25th November had grown to a strength of 3,000.

The last march of the Cavalry division, Oct.

In the eastern theatre the most important event during October was the march of the cavalry division, under General French, from Machadodorp to Heidelberg. Early in the month French was directed to hand over the command at Barberton to Major-General Stephenson and to return to Machadodorp. Thence he was to march diagonally across the "high veld" to Heidelberg, with the view of clearing the district of hostile inhabitants. For this purpose there were placed under his command Mahon's cavalry column and the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades under Generals Dickson and Gordon, with a total effective strength of 3,000 mounted

men, 300 infantry, 16 guns and four pom-poms. The full ration strength of the column, inclusive of transport, amounted to 4,800 men, 3,950 horses and 3,100 mules.*

Difficulties of the march.

The length of the proposed march, from railway to railway, was 173 miles, over a country destitute of supply-depôts. French, therefore, in addition to his regimental baggage of several hundred vehicles, was forced to march with a supply park of 155 wagons drawn by 2,480 oxen and stretching over 4½ miles of road. With this millstone round his neck, French was not master of his own movements. He was ordered to march slowly and clear the country methodically, but it was scarcely a case for orders, for the rations he carried and the pace of his oxen rigidly governed the scope of his march. Though horses and men were hard and fit, the oxen were in the worst possible condition. Nor were they likely to improve, for upon the open undulating grazing-lands that lay before them the spring rains had not yet fallen and the old parched grass contained little nutriment.

Progress of the march, Oct. 12–26.

French's intention was to move on a broad front, with the brigades of Mahon and Gordon in advance and Dickson's brigade and the convoy in rear. The movement began on October 12th, when Mahon, on the right, reached Geluk, Gordon and Dickson marching on the following day towards the Komati River. That there was plenty of fight left in the Boers of the Eastern Transvaal was proved at the outset. Tobias Smuts, having mustered 1,000 men of the Ermelo and Carolina commandos, singled out Mahon for attack, and on the morning of the 13th assailed him hotly, and drove him back on the railway. When Gordon came to Mahon's support Smuts retired and the advance was resumed slowly; but on the 16th Gordon, in his turn, was attacked, his Inniskillings losing 30 men and 40 horses. Incessantly harassed on flanks and front, French was forced to contract his front, and on the 18th reached Ermelo with his force concentrated.

* Gordon's 1st Cavalry Brigade.—6th Dragoon Guards, 2nd and 6th Dragoons; "T" Battery; 1,387 all ranks.

Dickson's 4th Cavalry Brigade.—7th Dragoon Guards, Lumsden's Horse, 1st Batt. Suffolk Regt.; "O" Batt. R.H.A.; 1,017 all ranks.

Mahon's Column.—8th and 14th Hussars; "M" Battery; 949 all ranks.

Five hundred oxen had already perished from starvation and exhaustion. From Ermelo westward French plodded stolidly on, stung and worried by a swarm of active guerillas and shedding oxen by the hundred. Bethal was occupied on the 20th, and on the 26th the force ended its march at Heidelberg. In the fortnight French had suffered about 100 casualties, and had lost 320 horses, 1,230 oxen and 55 wagons, while nine Boer prisoners and 49 voluntary surrenders and a few casualties were a poor set-off on the credit side. The march, indeed, had revealed with startling clearness the difficulties of the coming campaign. Beyond the barren advantage of traversing the Eastern Transvaal, French had accomplished nothing. Counter-attacks had not been feasible; and although the average speed, exclusive of the halts, had been only fourteen miles a day, the mortality among the oxen and the consequent loss of wagons had precluded even the removal of the enemy's supplies. In short, the task set before the cavalry might have been done as well by infantry. At the same time it was apparent that the regular cavalry, mainly consisting of heavy men, heavily-equipped, mounted on undersized horses, armed with a carbine which was no match, either in accuracy or range, for the rifle, unable to put into force their own tactical traditions and reluctant as yet to discard them in favour of new methods, were less suited than ever to exert a dominating influence on the course of events. A few days later the cavalry division was broken up; French was appointed to the command of the Johannesburg district, and Mahon left the seat of war to take up his new post as Governor of Kordofan.

The moral of the march.

Meanwhile, on the Delagoa Railway, which French had left behind him, the dispersion of the main Boer army had not permitted any appreciable reduction of the British forces. Though broken up into small bodies, the burghers clung pertinaciously to the vicinity of the railway and lost no opportunity of injuring it. An example occurred during the return of the Guards Brigade to Pretoria, when a train conveying part of the 2nd Coldstream Guards was derailed near Pan. Placed in a position of great disadvantage, the Cold-

Lyttelton's forces on the Delagoa Railway and at Lydenburg.

streamers, under the able handling of Major H. Shute, behaved with their customary intrepidity, lining the railway and, at a cost of five men killed and fifteen wounded, driving off the enemy. Exclusive of the Guards and of Stephenson's Brigade at Barberton and the adjacent stations on the railway,* General Lyttelton, who had received the command of the lines of communication from Pretoria to Lydenburg, had under him at the end of October a force of greater strength than that of any other British commander.† His own headquarters were established at Middelburg, in a central situation, while the railway was divided into sections under four subordinate commanders holding nineteen different garrisons.‡ The security of the district between Machadodorp and Lydenburg was entrusted to Major-General W. Kitchener, who, between October 25 and November 8, cleared the neighbourhood of the latter town.

Smith-Dorrien despatched against the guerillas of the "high veld," Nov. 1–7.

When French had left Machadodorp the local commandos at once reoccupied the country to the south and resumed their watch upon the British garrisons. It was determined, therefore, that a force should be sent against them, and on the evening of November 1 two columns left Belfast under General Smith-Dorrien and Colonel Spens, and after a long night march united at Van Wyk's Vlei. The spring rains had now begun, accompanied at first by intense cold. A blizzard, which raged all night, compelled Smith-Dorrien to abandon the expedition, and on the morning of the 2nd he gave the order to retire. This was the Boer opportunity. The rearguard of Gordon Highlanders was at once fiercely assailed, but received timely aid from the Canadian Colt gun detachment and a troop of Canadian

Action of Van Wyk's Vlei, Nov. 2.

* Stephenson at this time held Barberton, Kaapsche Hoop, Nooitgedacht, Elandshoek, Alkmaar, Nelspruit, Crocodile Poort, Kaapmuiden, Avoca, and Komati Poort.

† Seventeen battalions of infantry, three regiments of cavalry, 4th Division M.I., one R.H.A. battery, ten R.F.A. batteries, five companies R.G.A., two companies R.E., construction company and bridging troop, and six companies A.S.C.

‡ Pretoria to Olifant's River, Major-General J. C. C. Barker, H.Q. Balmoral; Middelburg, Lieut.-Colonel Carleton; Pan to Belfast, Major-General Smith-Dorrien, H.Q. Belfast; Dalmanutha to Waterval Onder, Colonel Reeves, H.Q. Machadodorp.

Dragoons under Lieutenant King.* The troops made good their retreat with seventeen casualties. On the 6th Smith-Dorrien set out again, this time with a single column,† and on the 7th reached the Komati River, where he found the enemy drawn up to resist his further advance. Attacked in front by the infantry, of whom the Shropshire L.I. bore the brunt of the action, and in flank by the Canadians, the Boers were soon driven from the field. But on the next day, when Smith-Dorrien began to return to the railway, the Boers again seized their opportunity to press heavily upon the rearguard. Colonel Lessard, with most of the Canadian mounted troops and two Canadian guns under Lieutenant Morrison, covered the retreat, while Colonel Evans, with 60 Canadian Mounted Rifles and two guns of the 84th Battery, forestalled a party of Boers who were endeavouring to gain a position on the flank of the column, and drove them back.

Action of Komati River, Nov. 8.

Lessard, covering the rear, now became exposed to an enveloping attack, which was pressed with vehemence by several hundred Boers. Morrison's guns, under fire at close range, were extricated with difficulty. Seeing the guns escaping from their grasp, the Boers mounted their horses and, firing from the saddle, charged down impetuously upon two troops of the Canadian Dragoons under Lieutenant Cockburn. Reckless of loss, they rode over the Canadians, wounded Cockburn and struck down or captured all but six of his men. Then they bore down upon Morrison's rear gun, which was retiring painfully with exhausted horses. Morrison promptly came into action at 800 yards and was gallantly seconded by Lieutenant Turner, who, in spite of two wounds, dismounted his Canadians and succeeded in arresting the charge sufficiently long to enable the guns to rejoin the infantry on a

Severe rear-guard action.

* *In this encounter the bravery of a young Canadian officer was specially conspicuous. Seeing that Major Saunders was badly hit and in imminent risk of capture, Lieutenant Chalmers, of the 2nd Canadian M.R., rode out to him under heavy fire, securing the safety of his comrade, but falling shot through the heart while performing this act of gallantry.*

† 250 mounted men (5th Lancers, R. Canadian Dragoons and Mounted Rifles); two Canadian H.A. guns; four guns 84th Battery; and 900 infantry, Suffolk Regt. and Shropshire L.I.

ridge in rear. Here Colonel Evans brought up the Canadian M.R. to the support of Lessard's Dragoons, and, aided by two guns of the 84th Battery, the rearguard defeated all further attempts to interfere with the retirement. In this close and bitter fighting the Canadian Dragoons alone had 31 casualties out of 95 men engaged. It would have been well if the tactical lesson of the action had been laid thoroughly to heart. The Boer charge, accompanied by fire from the saddle, was to prove the most formidable of all the tactical devices used by the guerillas. The practice, however, at this period was still in its infancy.

The south-east, Oct.–Nov.

The history of the south-east during the period under review is less eventful. Here, too, an enormous number of troops were locked up in garrisons. During October Clery's Second Division was fully occupied in protecting the Natal Railway, which was the object of many attacks. One of the worst of these incidents occurred near Vlakfontein on October 9. On the previous night a party of 300 Boers, under Shiel, had destroyed the permanent way near the station. Captain Paget, of the Rifle Brigade, with 18 of his men and two young engineer officers, proceeded up the line in some trucks drawn by an engine to ascertain the extent of the damage. The party was ambushed, Captain Paget, an officer of great promise, was mortally wounded, and all his men were hit or captured as they were endeavouring to leave the trucks. Another party of 25 men, under Captain Stewart, following on foot in support of the train, was also attacked, and Stewart was killed. These events took place within a few miles of a column under General Clery, which was on the march to Vlakfontein, but arrived too late to be of any service.

Combat of Vlakfontein, Oct. 9.

Changes in command.

At the end of October the Second Division was broken up, Clery returned home, and Major-General Wynne assumed control of the Sandspruit-Heidelberg section of the railway.* For active operations one mobile column, under

* The section was divided into four sub-sections, viz., Standerton, Lt.-Col. Fitzgerald; Platrand, Major Pearse; Paardekop, Bt. Lt.-Col. Pink; Sandspruit, Major Burrell. These included fourteen garrisons, held on November 11 by three battalions, 13 guns, one squadron Hussars, three companies Thorneycroft's M.I., the Burma M.I., and other details.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bewicke-Copley, was organised early in November, and carried out some useful clearing operations in the Standerton district. Its command passed to Lieutenant-Colonel Colville at the end of the month, when it numbered 1,435 men, of whom less than 200 were mounted.*

Hildyard in Natal and the neighbourhood, Sept.–Oct.

Further still to the south-east Hildyard's Fifth Division had extended its sphere of operations from Natal into Transvaal territory. During September Hildyard had occupied in succession Wakkerstroom, Utrecht and Vryheid; he had placed strong garrisons at all three points, and had connected Vryheid with Dundee by a chain of subsidiary posts at Scheeper's Nek, Blood River and De Jager's Drift. These were the halcyon days of British progress. Tamely submitting to the capture of their towns, the Boers had retired towards Piet Retief or to the mountains and forests east of Vryheid. Five hundred burghers surrendered of their own accord in September. But here, as elsewhere, their spirit began to revive in October. On the 1st of that month they captured a convoy of 36 wagons and a Hotchkiss gun near the Blood River from a weak escort of Natal Volunteers; and from this time onwards petty attacks on convoys, columns and garrisons were constant.

Hildyard's new command, Oct 19.

On October 19 the old "Natal Field Force," scattered far and wide as it was, ceased officially to exist, and Hildyard was ordered to take command not only of Natal, but of a district in the Transvaal south of a line drawn through Sandspruit and Derby. A little later Major-General Wolfe Murray, who had performed invaluable work on the Natal line of communications since the beginning of the war, left for India, and Colonel Lawson, R.E., an officer of marked ability, became chief staff officer in the new command. Hildyard, in an order dated October 31, broke up his area into the four sub-districts of Volksrust, Dundee, Newcastle and Ladysmith, with four independent commands at Howick, Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Eshowe. Under his hand were

* Bewicke-Copley's column.—Two battalions, 200 Thorneycroft's M.I., seven guns, in all 1,656 men; Colville had only one strong battalion, the 1st Rifle Brigade.

four squadrons of cavalry, 13½ companies of mounted infantry, 67 companies of infantry, and 43 guns, his total strength amounting to 12,000 men.* Hildyard's orders of October 31 display a sound grasp of the theory of the district system. His subordinates were informed that, in cases of emergency, there was nothing to prevent the troops in one section being sent into another without orders; that each was to assist its neighbour without orders; that time was not to be lost by reference; that the defences of important points should be so planned that, in case of need, an inner line could be occupied and the bulk of the troops freed for action; that mounted troops should be held in constant readiness to move; and that every advantage should be taken of convoys in order to relieve troops at out-stations. A good system was also devised for the patrolling of the rivers and mountain passes throughout the command.

The district system.

Excellent as all this was, it would be a mistake to suppose that such a system could have been applied to the whole theatre of war. It was very expensive in troops. Hildyard's forces, for example, were scattered over 36 garrisons, exclusive of Newcastle, which became quite a formidable entrenched camp. The character of the system was essentially passive, while the crying need in South Africa was for an active military policy. Officers in command of these scattered posts became more and more preoccupied with their supply and security, and less and less concerned with the pursuit of the foe. It is true that the retention of generals and troops in districts which they knew by heart had manifest advantages, but in the face of a sudden concentration by a peculiarly mobile and enterprising enemy these

Defects of the district system.

* Volksrust.—Major-General Talbot Coke (afterwards Colonel Bullock), two squadrons of cavalry, 1½ companies M.I., 22 companies of infantry, and 13 guns. The district included Wakkerstroom.

Newcastle.—Brigadier-General Burn-Murdoch, two squadrons of cavalry, half company M.I., 16 companies of infantry, and nine guns. The district included Utrecht.

Dundee.—Lieut.-Colonel Blomfield, 11½ companies M.I., 29 companies of infantry, 21 guns. The district included Vryheid.

Ladysmith.—Lieut.-Colonel F. R. G. Carleton, 2 squadrons cavalry, 7 companies infantry, eight guns.

advantages counted for little. In Hildyard's case circumstances at first were favourable. Natal itself was tranquil; and it was not till a year later, when the Colony was threatened with invasion, that the system received any severe test.

The Western Transvaal, Sept.–Nov.

In the vast regions west of Pretoria the railway system was less developed; fewer men, therefore, were absorbed by the defence of communications, and the record of events is mainly one of the movements of heavy columns endeavouring, with inadequate resources, to break up scattered bands which persistently avoided contact. De la Rey was biding his time; Kemp, Liebenberg, Celliers, Du Toit, Wolmarans, names prominent in the past and destined to become still more prominent in the future, were scarcely heard of now. Dispersion and evasion were the rule. Unflaggingly as the columns laboured, three months made scarcely any difference in the pacification of the country.

The Magaliesberg. Clements, Legge, and Broadwood.

Much hard work was done in and about the Magaliesberg. Here Rustenburg was held by Cunningham's Brigade,* with detachments at Magato and Olifant's Neks; while Commando Nek, Zilikat's Nek and Rietfontein had been furnished with garrisons early in September by Clements. Clements, Ridley (succeeded in the middle of October by Colonel Legge) and Broadwood operated in and around the main range during September, October and November; Paget, from the north, occasionally co-operating. The most noticeable feature of the operations was a combined sweep by the three columns along the crest and slopes of the range, when 38 prisoners, 227 wagons and a quantity of supplies were taken. Clements was weakened in the middle of November by the diversion of troops to French's new Johannesburg district. Twice when he came into Krugersdorp to re-fit, French, though not responsible for the operations in the Magaliesberg, impounded portions of Clements's force, a proceeding which was destined to have most unfortunate consequences.†

* 2nd Batt. West Yorks; 1st Batt. A. and S. Highlanders; 75th Battery; section Elswick Battery; 91 M.I., and details—1,975 all ranks.

† The troops thus diverted were the 1st Border Regt., 2 guns, 75 mounted men, on November 14, and on November 25 part of Legge's M.I.

Methuen in the far west

In the extreme west of the theatre of war Lord Methuen had been refitting at Mafeking during the first week of August, when he received instructions to traverse the Zeerust country and then march to Potchefstroom. At this period Methuen was strong, having not only the remains of the old First Division, together with Douglas's column, but also the Rhodesian Field Force, which, on the departure of Carrington for the north, had been reorganised under Brigadier-General the Earl of Erroll. Methuen set out on September 7 with two columns,* the first under his direct command, the second under that of Douglas, while a third column was formed at Ottoshoop under Lord Erroll, but, owing to transport difficulties, took no active part in the operations until the end of October. After a small success on the 12th near Lichtenburg, news arrived that the garrison of Schweizer Reneke was hard pressed, and Methuen, in co-operation with Settle from Vryburg, was ordered to its relief. Marching south he gained touch on September 17 with a body of 400 Boers under Tollie de Beer, and, pursuing vigorously, captured 28 prisoners, a Maxim, 26 wagons and one of the guns lost at Colenso. On the 22nd, the pressure on Schweizer Reneke being removed, Roberts directed Methuen to proceed to Rustenburg, with the object of intercepting President Steyn, who was known to have left the main Boer army and who might be expected to make a dash for the south. On his way to the new objective, Methuen fell in with Lemmer's Lichtenburgers near Bronkhorstfontein. The mounted troops and guns started away in pursuit; but some of Lemmer's men, wearing helmets, dressed in khaki and marching in regular formation, were at first mistaken for friends, and managed to get within close range before the error was discovered. Among other British

marches to relieve Schweizer Reneke, mid-September.

Beats Tollie de Beer, Sept. 17.

Action of Bronkhorst-fontein, Sept. 28.

* Lieut.-General Lord Methuen's column:—1st Brigade I.Y. (Lord Chesham); Munster M.I.; 4th Battery, two guns; 2nd Battery (Rhodesian F.F.); two pom-poms; 1st L. North Lancashires; half 2nd Northampton Regiment, etc. Major-General Douglas's column:—2nd Brigade Rhodesian F.F., including 4th and 5th New Zealanders and 6th Regiment Imp. Bushmen, under Colonel R. Grey; four guns 88th Battery; two guns 2nd Battery; two howitzers 37th Battery; two pom-poms; 1st North. Fusiliers; half 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment.

casualties, Captain Lord Loch, an officer of considerable merit, was severely wounded, while of the Boers 21 were killed or captured.

Fruitless chase of De la Rey, Oct. 10–18.

When Rustenburg was reached, on October 8, Steyn had vanished in the north, and Methuen's next orders were to march against De la Rey, who was reported near Bulhoek, westward of the Magaliesberg. But De la Rey lay hidden in the bushy kloofs and valleys of the Zwartruggens, which, to the very end of the war, were to be the despair of British leaders. Under incessant but petty opposition Methuen and Douglas reached Zeerust on October 18. Here Lord Erroll, leading the 1st Brigade of the Rhodesian Field Force, joined Methuen and replaced the 3rd, 5th and 10th Battalions of Imperial Yeomanry, who were sent to garrison Ottoshoop and some posts in its vicinity. Methuen now split his own column into two, giving command of the mounted men to Erroll.* A few days later Lemmer was heard of again; the three columns marched out, attacked him at Kruisrivier and after a keen pursuit, in which Colonel Grey and the Australians were prominent, disposed of some 40 Boers and captured 21 wagons.

Action of Kruisrivier.

Douglas leaves Methuen.

The prospects of the force were just beginning to look bright when orders came for Douglas to leave the western theatre and join the already numerous forces under French. He left Zeerust on November 1 and reached Klerksdorp on the 16th with a great spoil of cattle and wagons, but only 29 prisoners. This withdrawal of 2,270 men, including 800 excellent mounted troops, though at the time it seemed to signify little, was a measure from which the operations in the west never completely recovered. Methuen's zeal, however, was undamped. On November 10 he was again tackling his old antagonist Lemmer, this time at Wonderfontein, near the Little Marico. Here, again, 40 Boers were killed or captured, but no conclusive result was reached. Continually opposed by an increasing number of enemies, he was at

Action of Wonderfontein, Nov. 10.

* Erroll's force now consisted of the Provisional Regiment of Yeomanry, the Composite Bushmen Regiment, and Australian Imperial Rifles, in all 772. Major von Donop, R.A., was appointed to the command of the Bushmen at the end of November.

Lichtenburg on the 11th and back again at Zeerust on the 19th. A few days later he heard that Colonel Meyrick of the 5th I.Y., who was covering the progress of a convoy to Lichtenburg, had been held up by superior force. Methuen at once dashed off to the rescue, covering forty-three miles in twenty-three hours. Meyrick, however, had already extricated himself. At the end of November Methuen was left with Mafeking as his base and the three garrisons of Ottoshoop, Zeerust and Lichtenburg as his fixed points in the surrounding territory. But he was greatly weakened. Able to hold his own only in a much smaller district than had been originally allotted to him,* he could no longer detach troops to the Magaliesberg or the south, whence demands for succour fell on deaf ears.

Methuen's situation at the end of November.

Settle in the far south-west, Sept.–Oct.

Settle's work in the south was briefly alluded to in the last chapter.† He, like Methuen, had been called up to the relief of Schweizer Reneke, and had entered the town unopposed on September 22. On October 13, with 1,350 infantry, 600 mounted men and 10 guns, he was at Christiana, on the 14th at Bloemhof, where he took 50 prisoners, and on the 19th he entered the Free State and carried out the operations already described.

French in the Johannesburg district, Oct.–Nov.

French, meanwhile, had been amassing troops at the expense of Methuen in the far west, and of Clements in the Magaliesberg. French's sphere, known officially as the District West of Johannesburg, was certainly one of great importance. Not including the Magaliesberg, but extending southward to the Vaal and westward to Klerksdorp, it was the buffer district between De la Rey's unconquered bands and the economic centre of the Transvaal. Behind it was a vital part of the main line of railway; within it the important western branch to Klerksdorp, the gold-fields, and the industrial capital of South Africa. Troops were allotted to it with no sparing hand. Hart and Barton, whose operations in the Potchefstroom district were reviewed in the

* "The Lichtenburg district as far east as Tafel Kop and Rustenburg and thence up to the left bank of the Crocodile River below its junction with Eland's River."—*Lord Roberts's despatches, October* 10, 1900.

† See pages 23, 24, 26, 39.

preceding chapter, both came under French when he assumed control of the district on November 12. Barton, a few days later, was succeeded by Colonel Babington. The 15th Brigade, under Colonel C. E. Bradley, at Johannesburg, Gordon's 1st Cavalry Brigade, Douglas's column just detached from Methuen, and the troops taken from Clements for strengthening the garrisons of Krugersdorp and Potchefstroom, completed the large force at French's disposal. November was spent mainly in reorganisation, in strengthening the Klerksdorp branch line, and in establishing posts on the principal drifts over the Vaal, but much work was also done, mainly by Hart, in clearing those troublesome hills, the Gatsrand and Losberg. Save for the most trivial skirmishes, there was no fighting. Great numbers of non-combatants and great quantities of stock and supplies were removed from these and neighbouring areas, but no blow was struck at the Boers in arms, who either evaded contact or moved to more peaceful areas. At the end of the month French's four mobile columns under Douglas, Gordon, Babington and Hart, had a strength, in mounted men, of 1,292, 1,085, 558, and 300 respectively. The rest of his force was distributed over 25 garrisons, of which Johannesburg, Potchefstroom, Krugersdorp and Klerksdorp absorbed most men.

Paget in the north, Aug.–Nov.

We have now dealt with the whole of the eastern and western Transvaal; it remains to sketch the campaign in the north. This involves a somewhat deeper retrospect than that of any other operations in the Transvaal; for we must pick up a thread dropped at the beginning of this volume, when, on August 18, Steenekamp, with de Wet's big laager, was left labouring northward from the Crocodile River, while the Free State leader rode unnoticed back to his own country. Steenekamp, who was joined a few days later by Grobler with the Waterberg commando, attracted every column within reach—Ian Hamilton, Baden-Powell, Hickman and Paget—but made his escape safely, and, as we have seen, managed to return to the Free State. At the end of August, Ian Hamilton joined Roberts's main advance; Baden-Powell, handing over his command to Colonel Plumer, proceeded to

England to organise the new Constabulary, and Paget, with the mounted troops of Hickman and Plumer, remained on the northern railway line. Early in September Paget advanced as far north as Warmbaths, sixty miles from Pretoria, but on the 6th this place was evacuated, and Pienaar's River Station, only forty miles from Pretoria, became the northernmost post on the railway. After expeditions to Hebron on the west and Sybrand's Kraal and Rhenoster Kop on the east, both fruitful in cattle and wagons, but otherwise inconclusive, and after a raid by Hickman on Jericho, which produced 30 prisoners, Paget, in the latter part of October, carried his whole force to the west, and reached Rustenburg on the 31st. His object was to cut off Steyn, who was now definitely known to be on his way to the Free State. But Steyn had already passed, and when Paget crossed the Magaliesberg on November 1, had actually met de Wet at Ventersdorp. After a fortnight's unproductive work in the forbidding Zwartruggens, Paget retired to Rietfontein, and thence, on November 21, to Eerstefabrieken, east of Pretoria. Here he received orders for more serious work.

Sept–Oct.

Paget receives important orders, Nov. 22.

The first symptoms had appeared of a vigorous offensive revival among the Transvaal Boers. The impetus came from that gathering of leaders in the far north which was referred to at the beginning of the chapter. As we have just seen, Steyn, whose fiery counsels had a strong effect upon the policy of the sister-state, had travelled south three weeks earlier with his brain full of that scheme of invasion which, after the check at Bothaville, was partially carried out by de Wet in December. Louis Botha betook himself, late in November, to the high veld between the Natal and Delagoa Railways, and threw his personal energy into the work of reorganisation. Beyers, with the northern commandos, and Kemp, with the Krugersdorp commando, were deputed to co-operate with De la Rey. Lastly, Ben Viljoen was given supreme control of the north-east, with orders to oust weak officers, stiffen the spirit of the commandos and undertake offensive enterprises. In the period under review Viljoen's activities alone took open effect. They were the

Beginning of an organised revival in the Transvaal, end of November.

Effect of Steyn's counsels.

Botha.

Kemp.

Ben Viljoen.

first murmurs of the storm which was to break with violence in December.

Viljoen takes the field, mid-November,

Viljoen met with much obstruction from old and conservative leaders such as Erasmus of the Pretoria District commando; but, with the help of a daring and capable officer named Müller, who had recently become commandant of the Boksburg commando, he succeeded in infusing a good deal of discipline and spirit into the commandos north of the Delagoa Railway. On November 19 he organised simultaneous attacks on Balmoral and Wilge River Stations, conducting the former himself and entrusting the latter to Müller. Both failed; but at Balmoral an outlying post was captured, with a loss to the British of 43 men. On the 22nd, Viljoen, with 1,000 men, was reported to be near Rhenoster Kop. Lord Roberts, in one of the last orders issued by him as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, directed Paget to march against the Boer leader, and, in order to effect a decisive combination, Lyttelton was told to co-operate with columns from the Delagoa Railway. Paget, whose force had undergone some alteration,* left Eerstefabrieken on the 25th, and, marching north-east, reached the foot-hills of Rhenoster Kop on the 28th. Five days earlier he had warned Lyttelton that he intended to attack Viljoen on the 29th, but the co-operation from the south, owing to mutual misunderstandings, fell through. Colonel G. D. Carleton, of the 1st Leicesters, who with 2,000 men and 6 guns was deputed to march to the Wilge from Great Olifant's Station, marched a day too late. Another column of 650 men and 4 guns, under Colonel R. S. Payne, was sent out from Middelburg; but Payne's orders, which were altogether inadequate, left him no latitude for effective intervention. A third, under Colonel Macbean, starting from Belfast, was altogether *hors de cause.*

and attacks Balmoral and Wilge River Stations, Nov. 19.

Roberts orders Paget to march against Viljoen, Nov. 22.

Even without assistance Paget, with two battalions of

Action of Rhenoster Kop, Nov. 29.

* The Canadian Artillery left the force; half a battalion R. Munster Fus. changed places with half a battalion of same regiment at Pienaar's River; the 5-in. guns were exchanged for naval 12-prs., and the West Riding Regiment took the place of the Gordons. A few days earlier Colonel Cradock's New Zealanders had joined Plumer.

infantry, the Royal Munsters and West Ridings, nine guns, and 1,200 mounted men (Australians, New Zealanders and Yeomanry), under Plumer and Hickman, was greatly superior to his adversary. On the other hand, Viljoen's ground was skilfully chosen and exceedingly strong. His main position, held by 650 men, was a crescent-shaped line of kopjes, strewn with immense boulders, and facing north, north-west and north-east. The flanks rested on strong natural obstacles. The front looked for 500 yards over open ground. On the Boer left stood the Johannesburgers and Theunissen's Scouts, in the centre the Johannesburg Police, and on the right, under Müller, the burghers of Pretoria and Boksburg. Behind the position the ground fell in a succession of abrupt terraces to the rugged gorges of the Wilge River, passable only at Waterval Drift. To guard this drift and to watch Carleton's column, which was known to have left the railway, Viljoen placed Thuys Pretorius, with 200 Middelburgers, on the heights of Kranspoort, south of the river. Viljoen's second and safer line of retreat lay to the north-east, by Langkloof and Poortje's Nek, and this important line was watched, though at some little distance, by Erasmus, with 400 burghers of Pretoria.

Paget attacks at 4 A.M., but cannot make headway.

Paget, who had camped at Hartebeestfontein on the night of the 28th, moved out at 4 A.M. on the 29th. His tactics were to make a frontal attack with the infantry, while enveloping the Boer right and cutting the northern line of retreat with his mounted men. Both movements were initiated with great dash and gallantry. The West Ridings and Munsters made many attempts to cross the fire-swept zone which bordered the centre and left of the position, but each time were forced to recoil by the accurate Boer fire. Plumer's effort to turn the Boer right also ended in failure. Hickman's brigade of Queenslanders and Yeomanry, coming up on the left of the West Ridings, was there held in check. Colonel Cradock's New Zealanders worked round still further to the left, and the Victorians and West Australians, under Major Vialls, endeavoured to turn the extreme Boer right, which rested on two immensely strong kopjes commanding a deep ravine. The Colonials,

who were now engaged in their first pitched battle, fought with admirable steadiness, but, like the infantry, they could make no progress. At 7.30 A.M. Paget's whole line was at a standstill, and so remained, suffering considerable losses, until nightfall, when the men received the order to intrench. At 7 P.M. Müller made a vicious counter-attack on the New Zealanders and was repulsed after an hour's fighting. Viljoen, although he had held his ground with a loss of only 31 men, decided to retire during the night; so that at dawn on the 30th Paget found the position deserted, save for a party of Theunissen's Scouts who had not received the order and of whom a few were captured. Viljoen retired to the rich and healthy Lydenburg district, to proceed with his measures of reform and to hatch fresh enterprises. Carleton's movement from the railway could have had no effect on the main action, but might have been conducted with more vigour. It is twenty miles from Great Olifant's Station to Kranspoort, whither, with the generous allowance of two days, he was timed to arrive only on the morning of the 30th. He began well on the 29th by surprising the laager of Thuys Pretorius and capturing some wagons, but failed to follow up this success by a pursuit of the small Boer commando, which, laager and all, succeeded in crossing the drift at Waterval unmolested. Paget's casualties at Rhenoster Kop were 85, of which 33 were suffered by the West Riding Regiment, whose brave commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd, was killed in the act of leading a very plucky charge. Thirty, including 6 officers, were in Plumer's force.

Viljoen evacuates the position, night of Nov. 29–30.

Paget's losses.

The action, which was fought on the day that Lord Roberts left Pretoria for England, marks the end of one military era and the beginning of another. It was the last orthodox pitched battle of the sort that had been so common in the early Natal campaigns, and in Roberts's great advance through the territory of the republics. Paget, like many another general, had attacked a position with spirit, had forced his adversary to leave it, and could fairly claim the victory. Hitherto such victories, with more or less brilliant variations, had sufficed to effect a supremely important end,

The fight marked the end of a military era.

the invasion and occupation of the enemy's country. But their usefulness was past. The retention of his position at Rhenoster Kop mattered nothing to Viljoen, who had no definite plan and no definite base. Apart from the Pietersburg stronghold, which was to be won later, the war for positions was over, and the war against the Boer people, bereft of their towns and their railways, and relying on the natural resources of an essentially pastoral race, was just beginning. An army adequate for the first purpose was obsolete for the second and vastly more difficult purpose. It is here that the reader will find the key to the operations of the three months preceding Lord Kitchener's accession to the command. Events it is true, had moved quicker in the Free State than in the Transvaal. Under the restless energy of de Wet, the Free State Boers had already resumed a bold initiative, and already, in the effort to foil the projects of de Wet, there had appeared on the British side strong and hopeful symptoms of vitality and originality. Bothaville, fought three weeks earlier than Rhenoster Kop, and in every respect but that of gallantry the antitype of Paget's action, seemed fraught with brilliant promise. A few days later than Rhenoster Kop, de Wet had been thrown back from the Orange by forces better adapted for the new purposes in view than any of those previously organised. But, judged by the new and exacting test of Boers killed or caught, these successes were not much more fruitful than Paget's fight; while de Wet, as we have pointed out, had gained his ultimate if not his immediate end. Now, throughout both the territories so recently annexed, and even over the contiguous domains of Cape Colony, the ferment of revolt was spreading. The belief that the war was over—a belief springing not merely from military miscalculation, but from a profound and widespread ignorance shared by statesmen, soldiers and citizens, British and Colonial alike, of the inborn tenacity of the Boer character—was destined to be rudely shaken.

The war for positions was over.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM BEFORE KITCHENER

(December, 1900)

On the 29th of November, 1900, Lord Kitchener definitely took over the command of the army in South Africa.

Historical aspect of the problem.

To describe the task which lay before him as the most serious military problem that a British general has ever been called upon to face, would be an exaggeration. The struggle was confined to a portion of a single continent, and so long as the flames of war did not extend beyond the confines, wide as they were, of South Africa, so long too as the resolution of the British people remained inflexible, there could not be the slightest doubt regarding the final issue of the war. Those great sources of strength which had carried the nation triumphantly through so many historic crises remained, throughout all the changes and chances of the long-drawn struggle, unimpaired.

By her navy, Britain held command of the world's highways, and by these highways the necessary military resources passed uninterruptedly to the Cape from the four corners of the Empire and from its citadel, the British Isles, teeming with the accumulated wealth of centuries of national effort. All the work of reinforcement and supply went on with an ease and a celerity which had been unknown in the history of any previous war. The navy, too, stood between England and the intervention of jealous rivals who viewed her adventure with unconcealed displeasure, who were willing to wound but afraid to strike. At home, in spite of much baneful opposition, there was a more genuinely united people at the back of the Government during the long struggle with the Boer republics than there had been in any of the great

campaigns of the past; and the patriotism of the people at home was equalled by that of the citizens of the great self-governing communities whom the spirit of adventure had planted widely among the seven seas, and who had come forward freely to assume the duties inseparable from the rights of citizenship. Where these mighty reserves of strength and wealth existed, the general in command had only to state his needs in plain terms for his every want to be supplied with a liberal hand.

A comparison with other campaigns.

If we glance back through history and consider how widely different were the circumstances in past campaigns, and what stupendous risks our generals were forced continually to incur, owing to sheer inability of the mother-country to supply even the men and money which are the raw material of war, we are forced to admit that the enormous increase in the resources of the Empire, of their accessibility and what may be termed their mobilizable qualities, allow of no comparison between the difficulties of a Kitchener on the one hand and those of a Wolfe, a Cornwallis, or a Wellington on the other. But, with all this admitted, it may fairly be questioned whether any British general in the past ever had been confronted by such a grave and complex problem as South Africa presented in December, 1900.

The British aim unique in our history.

The British aim was not merely the conquest but the absorption of a free white race, a race no longer retaining the weaknesses of colonial pioneers, but firmly rooted in the soil. It was an aim unparalleled in the history of our nation. Yet it was an aim whose character and magnitude the greater part of the nation but dimly apprehended. This was not unnatural; for the relation of vassal and suzerain, which in varying degrees had existed for so long between the two peoples, had shrouded from the vision of the suzerain power the growth of a Boer national sentiment as intense as that possessed by any of the historic polities of the old world. Even to the Boers themselves the depth of this sentiment was a late discovery. Full national consciousness did not exist among them when the war broke out, and now, after a year's war, there were hundreds of brave and patriotic men who had definitely accepted defeat and who were ready to submit to

British rule. But at the time when Kitchener took command, a new spirit, stimulated indeed from a safe distance by the exiled President and the old warlike clique, but upheld in arms mainly by men who had been averse to the war, had begun to assert itself. It was this spirit which Kitchener had to fight. The conflict bore not the least analogy to any waged by Britain in the past, save the great struggle with her own colonies in North America. But, owing to the poverty of our military literature and the narrow horizon of our general education, the history of that war had become almost a sealed book to several generations of British officers. If, in the long run, a Tarleton found many imitators, the compliment of imitation was unconscious. The dashing leaders of light horse were evolved, not by study nor professional training, but by the light of nature, by the practice of the playing fields and the custom of sport continued and developed in the greater fields of war.

Relative numbers.

When Kitchener succeeded to the command, even after deducting the 15,000 prisoners of war and the 5,000 to 6,000 men who had fallen in the campaign or had been interned in Portuguese territory, there were still in the field about 60,000 Boers, foreigners and rebels. If the truth was not known and not recognised until, at the close of the war, numerical calculation placed the matter beyond all possibility of doubt, the fact remains unaltered that these 60,000 men, most of them armed and most of them mounted, existed in flesh and blood. Scarcely a quarter of them, it is true, was ever on a war-footing at the same time; but the men were there, and large numbers could be assembled by commanders who possessed authority. On the British side the total number of troops, amounting, when Kitchener took command, to some 210,000 men, was overwhelming only on paper. Nearly 100,000 were disseminated along the railways, upon almost purely passive duties, and many thousands more were immured in isolated garrisons. Large numbers were detained at the coast towns and at depôts, or were employed upon escorts, guards, safe-conducts, and other minor duties. Casualties and sickness were a constant drain. The dispersion of the troops and the long and often rapid

marches had left stragglers scattered all over the country at stations, garrisons, rest camps, and even in remote farmsteads. One of the great faults of the British system was proved to be the loss of touch between regiments and the men thus dropped, all count of whose existence was frequently lost for months at a time. On their side these derelicts found a life of ease not uncongenial, and, while some passively awaited marching orders which never came, others became employed as servants, grooms, cooks, waiters, hospital orderlies, and even as gardeners. Officers disappeared in a similar manner. Some, convalescent from wounds or sickness, found the pleasures of a few weeks' idleness too attractive to be resisted; others, belonging to disbanded corps, to the transport, intelligence, or other accessory services, crowded the clubs and hotels of the chief towns; while individuals of all sorts, both military and civil, connected with the many supplementary services which grow up around an army in the field, thronged the stations, bars and restaurants of many a town upon the lines of communication. Thus, although, generally speaking, the state of the army in South Africa was thoroughly sound, there were disintegrating causes at work which called for the control of an iron hand.*

Leadership.

Nor was this all. Even in the active force still available for offensive operations, influences were present which could not fail to give a prudent commander grounds for anxious thought. The first concerns leadership. It is true that the ordeals of the campaign had turned most of the troops into seasoned veterans; but the moral strain upon the commanders had been very severe. Many of the older men had grown disinclined to take risks, and were unequal to the fresh calls about to be made upon them by the infusion of redoubled energy into the operations of both sides. The war about to be waged required commanders

* When precedents are studied the wastage was not remarkable. Napoleon, crossing the Niemen with 363,000 men, reached Moscow, 500 miles distant, with only 95,000. Steam, railways, the telegraph, and the increase of national resources have increased so enormously the range and striking power of a great maritime empire that distant expeditions can now be undertaken with success which a hundred years ago would have entailed the exhaustion and ruin of the country which launched them.

possessing attributes but rarely associated with advancing years; the power of remaining long hours in the saddle, of enduring extremes of temperature and climate, of bivouacking on sodden ground with no covering but a blanket, of thriving on hard biscuits and bully beef, and of yet remaining always fresh and alert, ready to risk their reputations and their lives in the keen pursuit of a skilful foe. There is no army in the world possessing a larger number of officers capable of fulfilling these conditions than one created from the joint resources of Britain and her Colonies, yet even in this army the number of young leaders who combined the best qualities of head and heart was not large.

Dearth of mounted men.

Nor was it easy to find suitable columns for these leaders. Since a man on foot is incapable, save by accident or an act of God, of catching a man on horseback, it follows that for the pursuit and capture of the Boers the imperative need of the army was for mounted men. In this respect the prospect before Kitchener was sombre. Neither in numbers nor in quality were the mounted troops sufficient; and in numbers, as we shall see presently, they were about to suffer a diminution for which large reinforcements of untrained men were at first but indifferent compensation.

Cavalry.

The regular cavalry formed the permanent foundation; but the profound conservatism which, as in most regular armies, characterised this arm, debarred it from setting such an example of vigorous originality as was urgently needed for the conduct of the campaign. It must be conceded that to convert cavalry into mounted riflemen was a drastic and difficult change. Their training and equipment rendered them incapable of competing tactically with the Boers. The long-range magazine rifle, that final arbiter of modern combat, was unknown to them. Their manœuvres in mass were based on shock with the *arme blanche*. Individual intelligence was not high enough for skilled skirmishing, much less for skilled reconnaissance. Something had already been done to correct these defects. The lance had been eliminated, and, when Kitchener assumed the command, instruction had begun in the use of the infantry rifle. But proficiency with this weapon is not to be won

in a day; some regiments—so potent were the influences of orthodox cavalry training—took unkindly to the new methods; that subtle and sensitive quality, the "cavalry spirit," was destroyed, and there was nothing to take its place. Hence, although the cavalry always set a fine example of discipline, bravery and endurance, and although they produced a certain number of excellent leaders, the guerilla war added but little lustre to their historical achievements. Nor can the argument be pushed too far that the emergency was exceptional and peculiar; that a system good in itself and suitable for all normal occasions was unfairly tested by the unprecedented needs and strains of the guerilla war. Even before the war broke out there was abundant evidence that the system already was antiquated even for normal occasions, and that the best lessons for the cavalry were to be learnt, not from the continental wars of the seventies, but from the American Civil War of the sixties, when men of our own race, unhampered by prejudice or tradition, attacked and solved cavalry problems on fresh and original lines. To enlarge on this theme would lead too far into regions of acute controversy. But, unless his narrative is to be dull and unilluminating, no writer on the guerilla war in South Africa can shirk an estimate of its bearing on the tactics and training of cavalry. And the more soberly and carefully the campaign is studied, the more freely unessential circumstances are discarded and the essentials gripped, the stronger grows the conviction that, for all purposes, the old training and equipment is obsolete, and that skilled mounted riflemen can do all that cavalry of the old stamp can do, can do it better, and can do much more besides. One of the ablest of contemporary writers,* deeply impressed by the lessons of the Civil War, but, unhappily, not familiar with the final phase of the Boer war, has gone nearly as far as this in advocating change; but, on the ground that the cavalry spirit must not be tampered with, that the cavalry spirit, in one word, is "dash," and that the acme of dash is inherent in shock and is incompatible with the use of the rifle dismounted, he stops short of his logical conclusion.

* The late Colonel Henderson, in his "Science of War."

Such an objection can scarcely now be sustained. As the future narrative will show, all the tactical successes of the guerilla war—most of them, unfortunately, Boer successes—were won by dash, and by just that sort of dash which in former days inspired the decisive strokes of cavalry; with this vital difference, that the charge employed by the Boers with such success in the last phase of the war had no elements of physical shock, and derived its destructive efficacy from the rifle alone.

Mounted infantry.

The mounted infantry, starting with better marksmanship and more instinct for skirmishing, had also improved rapidly in their riding, and now, together with some of the colonial irregulars and the old yeomen, represented a most valuable category of mounted troops. But the mounted infantry had been used unsparingly, and, while their ranks had become greatly attenuated, they possessed no reserves. Here, again, conservatism, but conservatism of a very pardonable kind, was at work; for infantry regiments were naturally most reluctant to undergo depletion and weakening for the sake of the new arm. The new arm, indeed, was a makeshift, and, although strenuous efforts were now being made to strengthen the force both in numbers and in efficiency, the power it contained was still in embryo.

Colonials and irregulars.

With the colonials and irregulars the prospect was even darker. Originally, nearly all these bodies had been enlisted "for a year, or for such longer period as their services might be required." The exact terms of enlistment, which varied a good deal, had been established more or less at the will of the officers or others by whom the corps had been raised. For many corps this period of one year already had reached its term, or would reach it in the near future. Strictly speaking many of these troops could have been compelled legally to remain at the front, but the mention of one year in the terms of enlistment would have caused such an act of authority to be viewed as a grievance. Since it was necessary to do nothing to discourage the patriotic ardour which had called these men to the ranks, voluntarily and of their own free will at a moment of emergency, it was decided that the men who wished to leave

could do so. It is no reflection on the spirit of these men to say that the great majority complained of a surfeit of soldiering. The work had been hard, and there had been little of the glamour associated with war by those ignorant of its seamy side. Many required only a short rest, and the South Africans in particular, as the event proved, were eager to return to their old corps when they had visited their friends, spent their money, and enjoyed a respite from continual trekking. Of the over-sea colonials, also, many were ready to return, whether for service in new colonial contingents or as members of the South African Constabulary, which was now in process of formation; but, for the moment, one and all desired to leave the front.

Yeomanry.

The first contingent of Yeomanry, whose conduct had been excellent, was also approaching the limit of its utility. No reserves existed to maintain the strength of units in the field, and in a few short months the period of enlistment would expire.

The process of selection among the Boers.

On the Boer side exactly the opposite process was at work. Incapables and laggards had been shed in thousands, and although, under the bitter tests of war, thousands more were to fall out, the nucleus of tried and ardent veterans, constantly fed by a counter-current of accessions from below, suffered no permanent diminution, and indeed, until a point still far in the future, actually increased. For subjugating this nucleus, the mounted force was even now painfully inadequate.

Strain upon the existing mounted troops.

It will have been noticed that in his first individual effort to checkmate de Wet, Kitchener had been compelled to deplete many columns of their horsemen in order to strengthen the troops under Charles Knox. Strathcona's Horse were taken from French; Thorneycroft and Byng from the old army of Natal; Parsons from Settle; while the columns of White, Herbert and Barker were created only by breaking up an entire brigade of cavalry. When the raiders burst into Cape Colony it was necessary to organise troops for their pursuit, and Peter was continually being robbed to pay Paul. Many of Knox's units were diverted to the new objective, and the pursuit of de Wet himself languished for want of sustenance. The strain upon the resources of

the army was already at breaking point; and it was at this very moment that the most essential arm was beginning, for the reasons just given, to crumble in Kitchener's hands.

Infantry and artillery.

The infantry, resting on the solid and unfailing support of a professional artillery, still remained in the field, holding in an unshaken grip the ground already won; but the nature of the guerilla war made infantry and guns the last category of troops that were required for a strong offensive campaign. In a sense this was not a misfortune since, by the end of September 1900, the last men of the regular infantry, and of its reserve, had been despatched from England, and nothing remained behind but raw recruits.

Remounts.

The War Office had met every call for material of war and supplies with praiseworthy promptitude. It is its custom to maintain sealed patterns of every article of dress, equipment or material of war required by an army in the field, and upon receiving an indent from a commander it has only to exhume the sealed pattern and place contracts in the trade for any required quantity of the article in question. The only thing that was in general use in South Africa, and of which no sealed pattern existed, was the horse; and when it became necessary to supply horses, the War Office failed. The history of the Remount department during the war in South Africa is given in various Blue-books which are somewhat painful reading. We are concerned here only to note that the deliveries of horses never kept pace with the expenditure of horseflesh by the columns in the field. This was due partly to the false estimate of the military situation after the flight of President Kruger. The week before Lord Roberts left Pretoria the Remount department at home was ordered to stop buying and to recall their purchasing commissions from abroad; consequently the officers in Italy, Spain, and Canada returned home. But on the assumption of command by Kitchener the demands rose in December to 7,600 horses and 2,000 mules a month, and as these numbers steadily increased, the Remount department could never wholly make up the lost ground. There were also faults in

South Africa which were at least as great as those at home. Owing to the scarcity of remounts and the constant demands for them the horses arriving in South Africa were rarely given the necessary time to recover from the effects of a long voyage. Depôts indeed were formed and horses were sometimes drafted to them, but, owing to the want of veterinary officers and of other persons skilled in the management of horses, the animals lacked individual attention. Constantly a shipload of horses was put ashore, placed in railway trucks, despatched to the front, detrained in a soft condition and sent on long marches for which the poor animals were totally unready. There resulted an immense wastage of horseflesh, and this wastage was aggravated by the exceedingly low standard of horse-mastership prevalent among the mounted troops. In the country itself the measures taken for sweeping up the local supply of horses lacked thoroughness and foresight. There were still large areas in the new colonies where horses were abundant, while in Cape Colony hardly anything had yet been done to prevent horses from falling into the wrong hands.

The invasion of Cape Colony.

In addition to all these heavy disadvantages Kitchener was faced with the invasion of Cape Colony. Whether prudence and foresight could have averted it is an open question. To meet this very contingency Sir Alfred Milner, for some time past, had urged the permanent maintenance of a mobile force in Cape Colony. The line of the Orange, reinforced too weakly and too late, might have been held in force by troops which practically were idle elsewhere. Judging by later experience, however, when the strongest barriers were overleaped and the most vigilant guards eluded, we may fairly conjecture that the invasion could never have been prevented. At any rate the mischief was done, and it was useless to lock the door behind the stolen steed. Even at the cost of weakening the mobile columns in the north, which could ill spare a mounted man, troops had to be detached for the pursuit of the raiders. It was necessary also to make a new call upon the loyal elements in Cape Colony, not only for fresh enlistment in active corps, but for the local defence of towns and villages by the inhabitants them-

selves. To both demands the reply of the Colony was prompt and generous; but this hasty assembly of untrained men to withstand the veteran troops of the enemy was not devoid of elements of danger. Would the resistance of these raw forces, and particularly of the Town Guards, weak and scattered bodies under inexperienced leaders, prove of serious military value, or would the issue of horses and material of war to the new levies serve rather to place these tempting resources within easier reach of the Boer raiders? The future alone could decide, and, in the meantime, the risks had to be accepted.

A general rebellion not likely.

Although at the moment of the Boer incursion into Cape Colony the propaganda of rebellion was virulent, there were facts which tended to mitigate the military dangers of the situation. The Dutch sympathisers, already much discouraged by the abortive rebellion of the year before, were distributed over a very wide area, and it required a master spirit of acknowledged standing and authority to effect a general insurrection. Thanks to the hot pursuit of de Wet, that famous partisan had been disposed of temporarily, and none of the other leaders had the repute necessary to arouse enthusiasm or impose obedience. The well-to-do farmers for the most part were averse to further adventures; and though from among the young men a small but steady stream of recruits joined the invading bands, it was mainly in the shape of good information and moral and material assistance that the raiders gained strength. But desultory, in consequence, as the war in Cape Colony became, it always presented elements of great peril, and whether the flame burnt high or low, the drain upon the mounted men of the army was constant and exhausting.

Civil administration.

The military problem was gravely complicated by the question of the civil population of the new colonies. To a certain extent, but far from entirely, Kitchener had been relieved of his responsibilities concerning the civil administration by a change in the duties of the High Commissioner. Under the commission of 1889 the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope was *ex officio* High Commissioner. But by a commission of October 6, 1900, Sir A. Milner, who already

held both these offices, was entrusted further with "the prospective administration" of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. Such an onerous combination of responsibilities being necessarily of a temporary character, Mr. Chamberlain proposed in his despatch of October 18 that her Majesty's pleasure should be taken as to Sir A. Milner's appointment as Governor of the two new colonies, with a Lieutenant-Governor for the Orange River Colony, and that he should cease to be Governor of Cape Colony; an arrangement which was duly carried out, but which did not take effect until February of the next year. The apportioning of duties between the chief representatives of the army and the civil power in a country in which a state of war exists has always been one of the most delicate and difficult tasks that can beset a Government, but in this instance the causes of friction were reduced to a minimum by the close support which Lord Kitchener and Sir A. Milner afforded to one another. Both men had worked in Egypt under somewhat similar circumstances, and the experience thereby gained proved useful to both. Although no two men could have differed more widely in temperament, and although on fundamental points of policy they were, in fact, often at variance, it is a pleasant duty to record that in mutual loyalty they never failed. No discordant element due to divided responsibility was permitted to hamper the conduct of affairs.

Treatment of the civil population.

The treatment of the civil population was, indeed, a critical question. Into its past history, which was discussed exhaustively in Chapter XIV. of the preceding volume, we need not re-enter. Since March, 1900, there had been a rain of proclamations whose tone and substance varied with every passing phase of the struggle. On both sides there were errors, due mainly to ignorance of the rules of the war, and on the British side there was a vacillation produced by the unrealised transition from regular to guerilla war. Now, however, the atmosphere was clearing. To strike at an enemy's sources of supply is and must be one of the principal aims of a belligerent. The regular sources of supply once possessed by the Boers—

towns, railways, magazines—all, or nearly all, had been lost. Their new base was the farmstead and all appertaining thereto; private property had become indistinguishable from the magazines, stores and depôts of an army in the field. Since respect for property never can supersede the rights of a belligerent, the destruction of these resources on military grounds became an absolutely legitimate aim. So much is indisputable. Whether on broad grounds of expediency it was an absolutely necessary measure, is one of those questions which perhaps never can be answered finally. Sentiment pleaded strongly against it; and, from the purely military point of view, it is undeniable that the work of destruction distracted the troops from their primary aim of crushing the Boers in the field, and had a profound effect on the strategy and tactics of the campaign. But, whether for good or ill, the policy, inaugurated by Roberts in the proclamations of September, had been accepted in principle and was being put into practice, though not with any system or thoroughness, when Kitchener took the command. As yet the visible results were almost negligible, but a question, whose difficulty and magnitude, should the policy be extended, was not now realised, had begun to declare itself.

Devastation already an established policy.

Nearly all the farms were inhabited by women and children. It was not possible, on the plainest grounds of policy and humanity, that these defenceless people should be left to the chance of starvation or to the tender mercies of the Kaffirs. Thus, the removal of the families to a place of safety, where they could be fed from British resources, was the inevitable corollary of the policy of devastation. Camps for non-combatants, therefore, were growing up informally at many military bases on the lines of communication. At present they were small, and not a source of much embarrassment. But the difficulties inherent in their expansion were of altogether unsuspected gravity.

Camps for non-combatants.

Such was the situation when Kitchener took command. It was not till two months later, when Milner's dispatch of February 6, 1901, laid bare the whole truth, that the nation at large learnt how illusory had been the promises of an early pacification, how steady the retrogression since

The Home Government.

those promises were uttered, and how heavy were the sacrifices that still remained to be made. The Government was partially but not wholly awakened to the gravity of the position. In making their provision for the year 1900 they had calculated that until the end of September it would be necessary to maintain the army in Africa at a strength of 230,000 men, that from October to December these figures might be cut down to one-half, and during the first months of 1901 to one-quarter. These calculations having proved mistaken, Mr. Brodrick, who, upon the reconstruction of the Government and the transfer of Lord Lansdowne to the Foreign Office, had succeeded to the post of Secretary of State for War, was compelled to ask for a supplementary vote for sixteen millions. On making this announcement to Parliament on December 11, Mr. Brodrick described with pardonable pride the great military effort which the nation had put forth. He showed that Napoleon had been compelled to detach 400,000 men in Spain for five years against an enemy miserably equipped and inexpert in the field; that 30,000 to 50,000 Cubans, in a small island, had held at bay 227,000 Spaniards for two years, and that even America had been compelled to send 100,000 men to the Philippines to suppress the insurrection in her new possession. But he failed to draw the true logical inference. The future, not the past, was in question. In justice to Mr. Brodrick it must be recorded that he fulfilled to the letter the demands made from the seat of war; but it would have been better if, instead of allowing himself to become involved in the details of a grandiose scheme of army reorganisation, which could not possibly be carried into effect until the end of the war, he had thrown his industry, his energy, and his imagination whole-heartedly into the prosecution of the campaign.

Kitchener's first measures.

Kitchener, meanwhile, attacked the complex problem with thoroughness and courage. Where vitality was lacking in the army he infused fresh spirit. Either personally or by deputy, he raided the clubs, hotels, and rest-camps, and sent off officers and men to the front in considerable numbers. To meet the most urgent want of all, that of

mounted men, he appealed at once, through the Government, to all parts of the Empire; to England for the small residue of regular cavalry, for mounted infantry, for horses, and for a new contingent of Yeomanry; to South Africa for a return to their old corps of the irregulars who had been disbanded, and for fresh enlistments. He stimulated by every means in his power the creation and development of a new defence force in Cape Colony, and he issued orders that every horse available for military purposes in South Africa should be taken up for the use of the army. To the colonies oversea he appealed either for drafts to maintain the strength of contingents in the field or for fresh troops, and he urged that all these troops should bring their horses with them. By an Order dated December 13 the mounted infantry in South Africa were placed on a thoroughly organised basis, under the control of Colonel Alderson. A depôt and a training camp were formed at Pretoria and every provision made for healthy and rapid expansion. At the same time, every regiment of infantry then at the front was asked to send all the men it could spare to join the mounted branch. To this and every other appeal there came a hearty and generous response. But the organisation and despatch of reinforcements took time. Many months elapsed before the new mounted army was complete, and if we outline here the strength and character of the troops provided it must be constantly borne in mind that most of these troops were not available for use until April of the following year.

The despatch of reinforcements from England.

In England there was vacillation during December. Some members of the Cabinet fully realised the urgency of the crisis; others, in view of the reassuring declarations of their highest military adviser, still hesitated. It was not till the second week in January, when Lord Roberts had reached England, that vigorous steps were taken. Two cavalry regiments, the 1st and 3rd Dragoon Guards, and a thousand mounted infantry, trained at Aldershot, were sent at once to the front, and arrangements were made to despatch two or three thousand more mounted infantry in the course of the next few months. Lastly, measures were taken to raise a new force of Yeomanry. This new force

The second contingent of Yeomanry.

suffered cruelly from the errors and miscalculations of the past. It will be remembered that in the case of the first contingent, despatched in the early months of 1900, no provision had been made for drafts to replace wastage in the field. The mistake could have been repaired; for the organisation, brought into existence with so much patriotic energy, still existed. Nor was the will lacking. On May 2, 1900, and again on May 16, Colonel A. G. Lucas, the D.A.G., I.Y., wrote to the War Office, asking for explicit instructions and offering to raise drafts. The answer was a polite sentence of death for the Yeomanry organisation. Any recruits thereafter enlisted were to be raised directly by the War Office, and, the War Office added with a touch of impressive particularity, were to be trained and formed into drafts at Aldershot. Nothing was done; the existing machinery fell into disuse, and the force in South Africa was allowed to perish slowly of inanition. At the end of the year, under the ordinary wastage of war, the companies had fallen to an average strength of only 35 officers and men. On December 19, when bad news from the front had startled the whole nation, Colonel Lucas proposed to reconstruct the old machinery and raise 5,000 men as drafts for the old contingent. Mr. Brodrick's answer was a refusal on the ground that enlistment was going on for the South African Constabulary. The meaning of this was that Yeomanry, if recruited, as heretofore, at cavalry rates of pay, could not possibly compete with the Police, which was being raised at 5*s.* a day, and which offered a prospect of good permanent employment.

Raising of the new contingent.

On January 15, however, the logic of facts prevailed and Mr. Brodrick was permitted to call for Yeomanry at 5*s.* a day. The old organisation was revived: General A. R. Badcock, Colonel T. Deans and Colonel Lucas were appointed to act as a committee to confer with the War Office, and in the latter part of the month recruiting began at 51 Yeomanry agencies. Sanction was first given for only 5,000 men, but the limit was gradually raised. On March 5, while men were still pouring in, recruiting was stopped. By the end of March the total of 16,431 men and 506 officers had been

enrolled. Notwithstanding the zeal and ability which were thrown into the work, the long period of inactivity culminating in feverish haste produced the inevitable results. It is true that the stamp of man engaged was not as high as it had been a year before; for the national enthusiasm had cooled and, although there were many re-enlistments, the majority of men were now drawn from classes in which ability to ride and shoot is rare. There was also a great dearth of the necessary material for officers. But had there been more time to compare opinions, think, plan and train, many errors would have been avoided. Men poured into Aldershot and the Curragh before there was accommodation for them and long before officers were present to take them in hand. The tests in the case of the men were often hurried and perfunctory and in the case of officers many commissions were given on misleading recommendations. Owing to the complete loss of touch between the parent organisation and the Yeomanry now in South Africa, confusion arose as to the primary functions of the second contingent, whether, that is, it was to supply new drafts to the existing battalions or to constitute an entirely new force. In the first instance Kitchener took the latter view, so that, except in a few privileged cases,* the old territorial system was abandoned; the men were formed provisionally into "sections" of 110 men, and complete regimental organisation was deferred till the force reached South Africa. This system was found to be so unpopular that a belated attempt was made to revert to the old one. In the end a sort of compromise was reached.*

The new contingent in South Africa.

By Kitchener's express desire, the men, as soon as they

* The privileged cases were those of the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th Battalions, which were raised in London as complete units (Sir H. Seton Karr taking a prominent part in the work), the 88th and 89th Companies (Montgomery) and the 98th Company (1st North Riding). There is no doubt that the Territorial Battalion system, which was reverted to in the case of the Third Contingent, should have been retained throughout. The best men preferred it, and many of the best men were lost through its abandonment. Against it was the difficulty of providing senior officers. Except in the privileged cases, only second lieutenants were furnished in England, and this no doubt was wise, but it did not warrant a complete change of system.

were ready, were shipped out to South Africa, there to receive horses, equipment and training in certain specified base-camps. This, probably, was a wise decision, but, unfortunately, the promise of thorough preliminary training was not fulfilled. To meet the urgent need for mounted troops, most of the drafts were distributed immediately to the various columns, hastily equipped, given a rude smattering of military education and thrown into the field against the finest mounted riflemen in the world. The natural result followed. A certain proportion of officers and men, five per cent. at the utmost, who under ordinary circumstances would have been weeded out at an earlier stage, were found to be incompetent and were sent home, a step which threw altogether undeserved discredit on the whole force. Another result was that parties of these half-trained men constantly fell an easy prey to the enemy, to whom they served as magazines for the supply of rifles and ammunition. In one or two unfortunate cases a whole column was made to suffer severely. Nevertheless, in relation to the great risk run, it is wonderful how little ill resulted. The men, generally speaking, were willing, tractable and brave, and did much admirable work. Their greatest fault, and this they shared with most irregular troops, was an incurable aversion to the *minutiæ* of military discipline, which at moments of emergency are apt to prove of vital importance. As must always be the case with improvised corps, the volunteer officers were less efficient, relatively, than the men. The best were obtained either by promotion on the field or from re-enrolled veterans of the first contingent. It only remains to say that in the case of the new Yeomanry, as in the case of the old, in spite of renewed appeals to the War Office, no system was arranged for feeding the field force with regular drafts from home. The consequence was that at the end of 1901 a third and wholly new contingent had to be raised.

South African Constabulary.

With a long start of the Yeomanry, with the great advantage of offering good permanent employment, with severe tests and methodical organisation, Colonel Baden-Powell obtained for the South African Constabulary a remarkably high stamp of men. It is a pity that the best

and most prompt military use was not made of this fine force. Originally intended for peace duties under the illusion that the war was over, it should have been treated, as soon as that illusion died, as an integral part of the field army, to be employed to the best possible advantage. Its organisation, if thorough, was leisurely: it was of little practical use in South Africa until May of the following year, when it numbered 7,500 officers and men, a large proportion of whom had been raised in Canada and Australia; and then it was used not for the most active sort of work but for semi-passive duties which will be described later.

Australasian contingents.

Of the over-sea colonies, Canada, owing to political controversies which it is needless to dwell on, sent no more organised troops to the front until the close of 1901, but the Australasian colonies vied with one another in the zeal with which they forwarded draft after draft to the seat of war; 5,000 fresh troops were to arrive before the end of May, 1901.* The standard of excellence was naturally somewhat lower than it had been among the earlier contingents. As in the case of the Yeomanry, a larger proportion of men was drawn from the great cities, and a smaller proportion from the classes bred up to ride and shoot. Here again officers were the weak point, and in some cases discipline was dangerously lax; but the troops came to South Africa trained, and on the whole excelled the Yeomanry in aptitude for war. It is probable that, had they been raised on a territorial basis, as the first Canadian contingents had been raised, they would have done themselves still more credit.

Irregulars raised in South Africa.

Many thousands of recruits were raised in South Africa itself.* They fall into two distinct classes: those enlisted for service anywhere within the theatre of war, and those whose service was confined to Cape Colony. There was a third and somewhat nebulous class, with a very fluctuating strength of somewhere about 2,000, consisting of corps raised locally in Griqualand and Bechuanaland, primarily for defence, but partly also for active work in the western parts of the Transvaal and Free State. Under the first and most important head the number of new men obtained is impos-

* See Appendices.

sible to compute with accuracy, owing to the frequency of re-enlistment; but fresh blood was infused into all the numerous corps already in existence, and many new regiments, such as the Scottish Horse, Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, and the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, were formed, bringing the total of irregular corps of this class up to about 30. The Scottish Horse, raised and organised by its commanding officer, Captain the Marquis of Tullibardine, was unique in its widely imperial character, and should, in strict accuracy, form a class by itself, for its men were drawn from Scotland, Australia and South Africa. The first regiment was recruited mainly in Natal during December and January. The second regiment was raised partly in Victoria and partly in Scotland, men from the latter country being classed as Imperial Yeomanry. At a later stage fresh drafts, principally from Scotland and partly also from Australia, raised the strength of the two regiments to 1,800. Unique in composition, the Scottish Horse deserve mention as a good example of thorough organisation, *esprit de corps* and an efficiency in the field which was destined to be put to many severe and deadly tests.

Defence forces in Cape Colony.

To cope with the invaders and rebels in Cape Colony defence forces were organised by General Brabant and, as regards the local volunteers in the Cape Peninsula, by Colonel Cooper, the base commandant. Here a further sub-division is necessary. On the one hand there was the Colonial Defence Force, strictly so called, consisting of about 3,000 men, divided into nine or ten corps, which were on a permanent war-footing and were available for use in any part of the Colony*; on the other hand there was a large body of local levies, which under the name of District Mounted Troops and Town Guards, though they could and occasionally did volunteer for work in a wider sphere, were liable to be called out only in cases of emergency to defend their districts or towns. By May, 1901, this local militia had reached a strength of about 20,000, of whom rather more

* *E.g.*, the Midland Mounted Rifles, the Western Province Mounted Rifles, Colonial Light Horse, Frontier Light Horse; and in this class may be included Scott's Railway Guards, a valuable body of 500 men.

than a third were Town Guards. By October the numbers had risen to 23,000.

Quality of South African irregulars.

Of the irregulars raised in South Africa it is difficult to make any general appreciation. Though some of the older corps had been maintained in a high state of efficiency, none, not even the Imperial Light Horse, which continued to hold the highest place, was quite as good as in former days. Some of the newer corps also turned out first-rate soldiers; but others were of inferior quality. There can be no doubt that at this stage of the war the enrolment of irregulars was overdone and a great deal of laxity shown in the choice of recruits. Acute competition for men raged at the seaport towns. Loafers and wastrels of many races, attracted by the high pay, were engaged promiscuously, to the great detriment of many promising corps. Some of the Griqualand and Bechuanaland corps were mixed in race and colour, and though very useful in a limited sphere, were not fit to be pitted against Boer veterans. In Cape Colony the local militia, as distinguished from the active corps, was far from satisfactory. The root fact here was that the British colonist on the average was not so good a soldier as the Boer. Moreover most of the best Britishers had already been attracted to the more adventurous life of the active corps. There remained a quantity of very doubtful material for military purposes. It was drawn mostly from townsmen, who naturally were not as good as farmers, and it was in some cases infected with a secret sympathy for the enemy. Much good service was done by District Mounted Troops and still more by Town Guards, but surrenders, with their fatal result of supplying the enemy with arms and ammunition, were only too common.

Evacuation of garrisons.

Having set in train the machinery for the supply of reinforcements, Kitchener made arrangements for another important measure, the evacuation of needless garrisons. This was an absolutely necessary step, since it was impossible to increase the number of mobile columns unless many garrisons were abandoned. The reform principally affected the Free State, where a quantity of small towns

unconnected with a railway were given up.* All railway garrisons were maintained, but strong efforts were made, by improving their local defences, to reduce the number of troops which they absorbed. Allied with this reform was the no less important duty of protecting the lines themselves from the destructive ingenuity of the Boers; and it was in the measures taken to achieve this object that there appeared the first small beginnings of the blockhouse system.

Protection of railways.

Kitchener's policy with regard to non-combatants.

With regard to the closely connected questions of devastation and the treatment of non-combatants, Kitchener formed a momentous decision. Pushing to their logical extreme the principles already in vogue, he issued the following memorandum to general officers on December 21.

MEMORANDUM.

Instructions to general officers, Dec. 21.

The General Commanding in Chief is desirous that all possible means shall be taken to stop the present guerilla warfare. Of the various measures suggested for the accomplishment of this object, one which has been strongly recommended, and has lately been successfully tried on a small scale, is the removal of all men, women and children, and natives from the Districts which the enemy's bands persistently occupy. This course has been pointed out by surrendered Burghers, who are anxious to finish the war, as the most effective method of limiting the endurance of the Guerillas, as the men and women left on farms, if disloyal, willingly supply Burghers, if loyal, dare not refuse to do so. Moreover, seeing the unprotected state of women now living out in the Districts, this course is desirable to ensure their not being insulted or molested by natives.

Lord Kitchener desires that General Officers will, according to the means at their disposal, follow this system in the Districts which they occupy or may traverse. The women and children brought in should be camped near the railway for supply purposes, and should be divided in two categories, viz. : 1st. Refugees, and the families of Neutrals, non-combatants, and surrendered Burghers. 2nd. Those whose husbands, fathers, and sons are

* *E.g.*, in the south, Dewetsdorp, Rouxville, Philippolis, Fauresmith, Luckhoff, Jacobsdal. In the north, Vrede and Frankfort were evacuated in March, 1901, Hoopstad in April.

on Commando. The preference in accommodation, &c., should, of course, be given to the first class. The Ordnance will supply the necessary tents and the District Commissioner will look after the food on the scale now in use.

It should be clearly explained to Burghers in the field, that, if they voluntarily surrender, they will be allowed to live with their families in the camps until it is safe for them to return to their homes.

With regard to natives, it is not intended to clear Kaffir locations, but only such Kaffirs and their stock as are on Boer farms. Every endeavour should be made to cause as little loss as possible to the natives removed, and to give them protection when brought in. They will be available for any works undertaken, for which they will receive pay at native rates.

PRETORIA, 21 *December*, 1900.

Simultaneously and in accordance with the policy here expressed the following proclamation was published:— Proclamation, Dec. 20.

IT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED to all Burghers that if, after this date, they voluntarily surrender they will be allowed to live with their Families in Government Laagers until such time as the Guerilla Warfare now being carried on will admit of their returning safely to their homes. All stock and property brought in at the time of surrender of such Burghers will be respected, and paid for if requisitioned by Military Authorities.

KITCHENER,
Commander-in-Chief.

PRETORIA, 20*th December*, 1900.

It will be seen that the policy was inspired by two motives. In the first place, it was supposed that the removal of the families would induce fighting Boers to surrender, and would thus shorten the war. In the second place, it was a measure of humanity towards the unprotected occupants of lonely farms. The decision was taken somewhat lightly. In its primary object it failed absolutely. Far from providing an inducement to surrender, it lifted from the fighting burghers a load of embarrassment. To the British the military consequences were disastrous. To the Boers the gain was twofold. On the shoulders of their enemy lay Motives of the policy. Its result.

the heavy tasks of removal and maintenance, involving enormous expense and a grave hindrance to military operations, while they themselves, relieved of all responsibility for their women and children, were free to devote their energies with a clear conscience to the single aim of fighting. While one of the British aims was signally defeated, the other, that of humanity, was at first only partially attained. The scheme for the concentration camps was lacking in foresight. Adequate provision was not made for the hosts of refugees requiring shelter. The regular medical and sanitary staff were already fully occupied with the needs of the army, and men were lacking for the organisation and supervision of the camps. Sites chosen on purely military grounds often proved wholly unsuitable. Too much reliance was placed on the capacity for self-help to be shown by the Boers themselves, and the Boers proved to be helpless, utterly averse to cleanliness and ignorant of the simplest elements of medicine and sanitation. The result was that for a certain period there was a very high rate of mortality among these unfortunate people.

The immediate future.

But in touching on this evil, as in sketching the other measures taken by Kitchener on his accession to the command, we are anticipating the narrative of the war. For two months the army had little leisure for deportation or devastation, and nearly five months elapsed before the reinforcements called for were all placed in the field.

Immediately before Kitchener lay a period crowded with emergencies; first a fierce outbreak of activity in the Transvaal; then a second and this time a successful effort by de Wet to invade Cape Colony; everywhere on the Boer side a growing spirit and skill in arms; everywhere on the British side a harvest to be reaped of apathy and unpreparedness. Not till April of the next year did the British Commander-in-Chief regain the initiative in any real sense, and just when he did so the old mounted army, into which he had breathed new life, ceased practically to exist, and a new unseasoned force took its place. In the meantime there were no heroic measures to be applied. All Kitchener could do was to inculcate energy, to hold his ground patiently

and doggedly and to use every short breathing-space for such returns to the offensive as were feasible.

Problems multiplied as time went on. In the foregoing paragraphs some have been stated at length, some only foreshadowed; others were wholly new. To pronounce on them at this stage would be premature; but in order to give the reader clues to guide him through the intricate maze of the guerilla war, it may be as well to indicate and summarise. Future problems outlined.

One of the most important of the strictly military issues was that of control. The regular organisation of the army was already obsolete. Its terminology survived, it is true, for some time longer. In some quarters troops continued to be classified under divisions and brigades, but for practical purposes this classification had ceased to have significance. In the field army the column became the unit; 38 columns existed when Kitchener took the command, and the number ultimately was doubled. How were these columns to be manipulated? Singly, or in groups large or small? By districts or otherwise? And what were the degrees of responsibility to be given to the column commander, the group or district commander and the headquarters organisation? Was devolution or centralisation to become the rule? Kitchener began by grappling with these problems in a perfectly practical spirit. In meeting emergencies he did what seemed to him to be the expedient thing, regardless of tradition and precedent. He hoped at first, no doubt, to make his will effective through eight or ten senior men who should interpret his general directions, and through them and their subordinates to propel the machinery of war in a systematic fashion. But from the very first circumstances warred against this system. So long as the Boers remained dispersed it operated well enough, but as soon as they coalesced and undertook big enterprises it broke down. In these circumstances we shall find Kitchener descending upon the scene of disturbance, superseding local commanders, choosing on the spur of the moment and regardless of seniority the best men he could find, robbing distant districts of columns for the benefit of the threatened area, and, when he had started the new machinery, returning to await the result. Control.

We shall find him going further; intervening in the operations, sending orders, sometimes to the general in charge, sometimes even directly to that general's subordinates. To the old school such interference was anathema, yet there were strong reasons to be urged for it. In a silent, distant room, linked up by telegraph to every post and garrison in the country, sensible of the slightest shock at the remotest extremity, the Commander-in-Chief often was better able to judge of a situation than his lieutenant on the spot, immersed in the immediate object in hand, groping somewhat blindly, perhaps, in a remote and difficult region, and out of touch with the strategic point of view of the higher command. On the other hand, interference was a dangerous weapon to handle. Employed too freely, and especially in the hands of a man of powerful will and imperious instincts, it was liable to impair responsibility and personal initiative, to discourage that spirit of spontaneous and unselfish co-operation which above all things needed stimulating, and to crystallise into a system of cast-iron control exhausting to the organiser and weakening to the virility of the army as a whole. But was there in Kitchener's subordinates a sufficient foundation of capacity for guerilla war and of readiness to take responsibility? This, after all, was the main question; for in every great undertaking, military or civil, men are apt to follow the same rule of devolving when they can trust their subordinates and of centralising when they cannot. To strike a just balance, to elicit the maximum of individual enterprise and combine it with firm central control, this always is a task demanding the highest qualities of an administrator; and in war, which is not an exact science but a moving drama full of incident and passion, full of momentary opportunities and sudden emergencies, the commander who relies too much on central schemes and too little on the men who carry them out must be prepared for a measure of sterility in both.

Allied problems.

The problem, of course, was not an isolated problem. Involved in it, though the connection is not always apparent, were many subsidiary questions of mobility, intelligence, tactics and training, together with that ever-present difficulty of combining the two antagonistic functions of devastation

and pursuit; and all these questions, each with its own independent interest and each affecting others, will confront the reader at every step. The less mobile a column, the fewer its openings for independent enterprise; the worse its scouting, the greater its dependence on centralised intelligence, and the more feeble its tactical efficiency, the more inclined would its leader grow to avoid decisive engagements and become the passive slave of a scheme. Analysing the matter to its roots, we come finally to the individual efficiency of the private soldier in marksmanship, cleverness and dash, and we find that this individual efficiency governed in varying degrees all other questions, even to the highest. It may be as well to remind the reader, who has heard much of the dearth of mounted men and the urgent need for more, that it was not merely a question of pursuing Boers and bringing them to action, but of beating them when caught and, in the alternative case where the Boer was the aggressor, of retaliating effectively. In tactics the Boers did not stand still. If not by conscious organised effort, at any rate by native vigour and resource, they made astonishing progress; and indeed, as we hinted in some remarks upon cavalry, it is open to question whether in some respects they did not revolutionise the art of handling mounted men. An especially interesting point for the reader to watch is their growing independence of artillery and the vitality which this independence imparted to their tactics.

The British attitude toward peace.

Mingled with the purely military problems which lay before Kitchener, there was a political issue of scarcely less importance. What was to be the British attitude in regard to peace? Here we return to the fundamental aim of the war—absorption. Both sides were tired of war, but both were equally determined to win and clung to their purpose with all the tenacity of their consanguineous races. Technically the Boer territories were already annexed, and the practical issue of the future, when the echoes of war had died away, was to make these stubborn farmers loyal and contented citizens of the Imperial family. A settlement calculated to realise this object was not easy to attain. With whom was the main responsibility for its

attainment to rest? By analogy with most wars it should rest with the civil power, represented in South Africa by Milner. But once again the situation was unique. No general in the past had been placed in Kitchener's position. He was fighting a nation in arms, so that the military surrender and the political surrender must, in the nature of things, be closely intertwined. His army, moreover, was, in a very peculiar sense, arbiter of the settlement. Unidentified with the fierce political antagonisms of the past, it represented the first intimate contact between the empire at large and the Boer race. Its commander-in-chief, therefore, was marked out to play a leading, perhaps the leading, part in the final pacification. Whether, from the highest political standpoint, this position was a desirable one, the reader must be left to judge. At this point we are only concerned to indicate the conditions which gave rise to it and to prepare the reader for a difference of opinion between Kitchener and Milner, which at a later stage assumed a somewhat important aspect. Broadly speaking, the difference was this: that Milner, from the political point of view, favoured unconditional surrender; Kitchener, primarily from the military, but incidentally from the political point of view, was content to obtain a surrender on terms. But, in the meantime, there was one expedient which both could unite in trying. This was to encourage the movement towards peace which had arisen within the Boer nation. Kitchener promptly placed himself in communication with influential men among the surrendered Boers, and it was partly on their advice that the proclamation of December 20 was framed. Nor did he stop here. At a meeting held early in December, under the presidency of Mr. Meyer de Kock, of Belfast, a Peace Committee was formed, with de Kock as secretary, for the purpose of urging upon the commandos the hopelessness of resistance and the need for a general surrender. A meeting of surrendered Boers convened by this Committee was held in Pretoria on December 21, and was addressed sympathetically by Kitchener. He promised the Committee his advice and support, spoke of the military conditions which exacted the formation of concentration

The Burgher Peace Committee, December, 1900.

camps, of his determination to give the enemy every possible chance of submitting voluntarily and of the just and progressive government which at the end of the war it was proposed to establish. The speech was printed in Dutch and English, and steps were promptly taken to give it and the proclamation of December 20 wide circulation. To this end emissaries were appointed to visit the commandos and preach the gospel of peace.

Failure of the propaganda.

Like the proclamation itself the peace propaganda produced the contrary effect to that hoped for. It exasperated the fighting burghers, who viewed its promoters, sincerely patriotic as they were, as cowards and traitors, and, when they obtained the opportunity, treated them as such. Though most of the emissaries escaped in the course of time to the British lines, many were tried by court-martial and sentenced to fines and imprisonment. Meyer de Kock himself, having ridden into Viljoen's lines at the end of January, was tried, sentenced to death for high treason, and executed. In one notorious case there is, at least, a grave suspicion that an irregular and violent course was taken.* On the whole, however, the treatment accorded to the peace emissaries was regular and not, under the circumstances, unduly harsh. In taking the risk of attempting to seduce the men on commando, they acted with their eyes open according to their own sense of patriotism. The fighting burghers, holding a different standard of patriotism, were within their rights in applying even extreme penalties.

The military crisis.

The failure was discouraging. What was to be the next step? The answer to that question must be left for a later chapter. For the present Kitchener flung all his strength and energy into meeting and overcoming a grave military crisis.

* Messrs. Morgendaal and Wessels, who left Kroonstad at the end of December, were captured almost immediately, taken to de Wet's laager, and there court-martialled and sentenced to death. The burghers protested, however, and the sentence remained in abeyance. So much is certain, and it is also certain that on January 10, when the commando was inspanning in view of a British attack, Morgendaal was flogged and then shot outright. It is said that this was done by Commandant Froneman in a fit of violent temper, and that de Wet himself was present; but full evidence is lacking as to the exact circumstances of the affair. At the end of the war it was not thought advisable to take action in the matter.

CHAPTER IV

NOOITGEDACHT AND THE TRANSVAAL OUTBREAK

(Dec. 1900—Jan. 1901)

I

Nooitgedacht and the Outbreak in the West

The Boers take the field in the west, Dec. 1900.

KITCHENER had hardly succeeded to the command when the offensive revival among the Transvaal Boers, already heralded by Viljoen in the north-east, took sudden and violent shape in the north-west. The moment was favourable. Paget had been withdrawn to operate against Viljoen; Clements, crippled by abstractions from his force, was inactive at Krugersdorp, and Broadwood alone remained to watch De la Rey and the Magaliesberg.

Map of W. Transvaal, end of volume.

Dangers of the line of supply to Rustenburg.

The supply of the garrison at Rustenburg, under General Cunningham, had been carried on by the despatch of convoys from Pretoria *via* Rietfontein, and, so long as Broadwood, Paget and Clements were all in the neighbourhood, the protection of these convoys could be reasonably assured. But after the departure of the two latter this protection no longer existed, and the line of march from Rietfontein to Rustenburg became exposed to the insults of any Boer force which chose to enter the district and was capable of evading Broadwood. Nevertheless, so lax was the conduct of affairs in this quarter that although Broadwood was for the moment south of the Magaliesberg, a large empty convoy was sent from Rustenburg to Rietfontein, was filled up there on December 1, and on the 2nd, under a wholly inadequate escort, was despatched again to the west in two sections, which left at 3 A.M. and 3 P.M. respectively. The first section, numbering 138 wagons and occupying a mile and a half of road, was

preceded by one company of the West Yorkshires, 70 strong, and two guns of the 75th Battery, with an escort of 21 men of the Yorkshire Light Infantry. Another weak company of the West Yorkshires formed the rearguard, and the whole was under Major Wolrige-Gordon, of the A. and S. Highlanders. Such a valuable train so weakly guarded would have proved an irresistibly tempting bait to a less enterprising enemy than the Boers.

Convoy disaster at Buffelspoort, Dec. 3.

Soon after daylight on the 3rd, when the head of the advanced guard had reached the difficult ground about Buffelspoort, where the road crosses a tributary spur of the Magaliesberg, a party of 600 Boers under De la Rey and J. C. Smuts, advised by their spies of the weakness of the escort, burst suddenly upon the centre and rear of the convoy and made prize of it. When the attack began, Gordon, who was with the advance guard, took post with half a company and the guns on a rocky knoll close to the road, and sent his other half company to a commanding hill 400 yards distant. But the greater part of the convoy, owing to the nature of the ground, was out of sight of the advance guard, and the brunt of the attack fell upon the weak company on rearguard, which, in spite of a stout resistance, was overwhelmed by weight of numbers and captured at 1 P.M. Looting and burning the wagons, the Boers worked their way to the head of the convoy and delivered a fierce attack upon Gordon and the guns. The detached half-company shared the fate of the rearguard, but Gordon, Captain Farrell (commanding the artillery), and Lieutenant Lowe, with their gallant remnant of Yorkshiremen and gunners, made a superb stand. At dusk, after several hours' fighting, most of the gunners and many of the escort had been shot down; Farrell was serving a gun himself; there were but two shells left, and the infantry were awaiting the final onset with fixed bayonets. But De la Rey had obtained all he wanted and preferred to let alone these desperate survivors. 138 wagons, 1,832 oxen and 75 prisoners had fallen into his hands; while Gordon's casualties were 18 killed and 22 wounded. The second half of the convoy was not attacked and was parked in safety some miles

to the eastward. News of the attack having reached Rustenburg by signal at 12.20 P.M., Cunningham sent out a small party under Major Fry, and informed Broadwood, who had reached Olifant's Nek at 4.30 P.M. Fry, marching hard, arrived on the scene of the fight at 1.30 A.M. on the 4th, and Broadwood joined him at 6.30; but the Boers had made good their retreat and very few wagons were recovered intact.

Movements of Clements and Broadwood, Dec. 3–8.

Had the despatch of the convoy been timed with the least reference to the general situation, the accident need not have happened; for on December 1 Kitchener had ordered Clements to leave Krugersdorp and operate in the Hekpoort valley south of the Magaliesberg, while Broadwood, with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade * had been ordered to cross the range from south to north and watch the road to Rustenburg. In pursuance of these instructions Clements started on the 3rd, and moving down the Hekpoort valley reached Nooitgedacht at midday on the 8th. On the same day Broadwood was at Kromrivier, on the northern side of the range. Communication was established between the two forces and a joint movement toward Olifant's Nek arranged, but on the 9th, Clements sent a message cancelling this plan and saying that he must wait for reinforcements and supplies.

Clements attempts to obtain reinforcements.

Disquieting rumours were in the air, and Clements had for some time past been uneasy as to the strength of his column. With Colonel Legge's small mounted force and his own troops, mainly infantry, he had in all 1,500 men, nine guns and a pom-pom.† De la Rey was known to be in a strong position at Zeekoehoek, only eight miles to the south, and was believed to have been strongly reinforced. Before starting work, therefore, Clements made every effort to regain the troops of which he had been deprived ‡ and to add to

* Broadwood's force:—8th Hussars, 240; 10th Hussars, 273; 12th Lancers, 256; 2nd R. Dublin Fusiliers, 500; "Q" Battery, R.H.A.; one pom-pom and one gun of the Elswick Battery.

† Colonel Legge's force:—Cookson's Corps, i.e., 242 2nd M.I., and 211 Kitchener's Horse; "P" Battery, R.H.A., four guns, one pom-pom.

Major-General Clements' force:—8th Battery, four guns; one 4·7-in. gun; 200 I.Y.; 560 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers; 279 K.O. Yorkshire L.I., and details.

‡ See chap. ii., p. 55.

his transport, which was painfully deficient. On the 7th, he telegraphed to Lord Kitchener and General French stating that he urgently required men and rations, and asking that the men he had sent to Krugersdorp and the mounted infantry lent to French might be sent at once to Nooitgedacht. French replied to Kitchener direct. "Clements is asking me to reinforce him. This is impossible. I think he should fall back for supplies. He has delayed in the north watching Boers who took convoy." On the 8th, acting on his own account, Clements ordered his Krugersdorp troops to join him, but this order was countermanded from headquarters. Fresh appeals followed, and finally, on the 10th, General Hart, commanding at Krugersdorp, telegraphed to French that he was prepared to dispense with all Clements's troops if it were decided that they were to go. French at once acquiesced, and Hart arranged for Colonel Shekleton to march on the 12th with 500 men of the 1st Battalion Border Regiment, 300 horsemen and two guns. Still dissatisfied, Clements directed Shekleton not to march until he had collected 200 men, a pom-pom, and some engineers from Potchefstroom, 100 mounted men from Hart's railway posts, and 70 more wagons. With all his good will Hart could not spare the men from the railway posts without danger to effective watch, and, though willing to lend Clements 14 wagons, found 70 beyond his power. Reference had to be made to French, who promptly ordered Shekleton to start without further delay. Shekleton marched at 4 A.M. on the 13th, but before he was clear of Krugersdorp his chief was already engaged in a desperate struggle.

Beyers marches south, Dec. 7–12.

The rumours of Boer unrest were not without good foundation. It will be remembered that one of the schemes concocted by the Transvaal leaders at Pietersburg was for a junction between Beyers and De la Rey.* Paget's withdrawal from the northern district offered the requisite opportunity, and Beyers was quick to seize it. With the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos, and with Kemp's Krugersdorp commando, 1,500 men in all, and a wagon-train which covered three miles of road, he left Warm-

* See chap. ii. p. 60.

baths on December 7 and marched south. It was a difficult enterprise that lay before him. Not only had he to defy Paget's intelligence service, which was still in existence, though the General was away, but to march 80 miles, elude Broadwood, cross a precipitous mountain-range by some inferior track (for the main passes were held), and effect his junction within a few miles of Clements. By native audacity and the negligence of his foes he managed to do all this. Reaching Bethanie on the 11th, he made a rapid night-march to Breedt's Nek, where a bad and rarely-used wagon-track crosses the Magaliesberg. Here, on the 12th, he laagered his force for a few hours, and in the meantime rode over to meet De la Rey, who had moved his commandos from Zeekoehoek to Boschfontein, a little to the south of the Nek. Both Boschfontein and the Nek were about five miles from Clements's position at Nooitgedacht. De la Rey had been strongly reinforced, and the two leaders between them had about 3,000 men and five guns.

His march is known, but not reported to Clements.

At every stage Beyers had been observed, but, owing to defects in the British intelligence, both central and local, the full truth was not known. Paget's spies had noticed the move from Warmbaths, but Paget was at Rhenoster Kop, and thither, under the existing routine, the information had to follow him before it could be transmitted to Pretoria, and from Pretoria to Clements. Percolating through by these devious channels, it reached Clements just too late. Again, when Beyers was approaching Bethanie, the native chief Koos Mamagalie, while professing friendliness, gave warning of the presence of his force, a warning which was transmitted to Pretoria, and thence to Broadwood, but not, by some oversight, to Clements. On the 11th, accordingly, Broadwood, who had been at Kromrivier since the 8th, marched east to Eland's Kraal, where he was only 12 miles south of Beyers. But his information was vague; Cunningham's district intelligence had no clues; his own spies and scouts could learn nothing, and in the afternoon he was drawn away by a message from Cunningham that Olifant's Nek was about to be attacked. He marched west, therefore, to Oorzak and remained there

General C. F. Beyers.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

during the 12th, 10 miles from Breedt's Nek and 15 miles from Nooitgedacht, whither he had helio communication with Clements. Finally, Clements himself heard on the 12th, through his own intelligence officer, that a large Boer force was near Breedt's Nek, five miles west of his position; but, knowing nothing of Beyers's march from the north, he assumed that it was De la Rey alone, who, from his camp at Zeekoehoek, had marched to that point. Native runners, sent to the north of the mountains, were hurrying south with definite news of Beyers's march, but taking a roundabout course by way of Commando Nek, they, like the messages from Pretoria, arrived on the scene too late. On the evening of the 12th, therefore, Clements was wholly ignorant of the strength of the Boer force so secretly and swiftly concentrated.

The Nooitgedacht position, night of Dec. 12.

His camp at Nooitgedacht lay close to the foot of the Magaliesberg. Above it the wall of mountain, rising precipitously to a height of 1,000 feet, was cloven by a deep ravine known as Nooitgedacht Nek, up which a steep and narrow bridle-path climbs to the crest. It was from the crest that Clements maintained helio communication with Broadwood on the northern side of the range. This, in fact, was the reason for his presence at Nooitgedacht. He had camped there on the 8th, not with the idea of taking up a defensive position, for which, indeed, the place was wholly unsuited, but in order to keep touch with Broadwood, with a view to joint operations in the future. On the night of the 12th his dispositions were as follows. On the summit of the mountain 300 men of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers formed an irregular line of pickets, divided into two sections and covering some two miles of ground around the head of the pass. Captain Yatman was in immediate charge of the four companies employed, but the position had been chosen under the superintendence of Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. C. Lambton, commanding the battalion. It is important to note that the term "picket-line," in so far as it implies supports in rear who are ready for prompt reinforcement, was in this case a misnomer. The Fusiliers, for practical purposes, were isolated. The very important position they

Map, p. 106.

held, while it dominated the main camp 1,000 feet below, was connected with it only by the steep and narrow path previously described. At the foot of the range Legge's mounted infantry provided a screen of outposts to the west and south of the camp, the 2nd M.I. standing on the right, where they held the line of a big spur which juts out southward from the berg, and Kitchener's Horse on the left. The southernmost picket of Kitchener's Horse, resting on a small but commanding kopje, was added to the chain as late as 10.30 P.M., in consequence of the last report from the intelligence officer. On the same grounds all Legge's pickets were doubled in strength. The Yeomanry and the rest of the infantry formed outposts for the east and south-east. In the latter direction a hill known as Yeomanry Hill, occupied by a small force of Yeomanry, was to prove of great importance on the following day. In the centre, close to the foot of the pass, were the main bodies of all detachments, together with the guns and transport.

De la Rey attacks, Dec. 13.

While the camp lay in fancied security De la Rey and Beyers were preparing to fall upon it. The plan was well conceived. Beyers, leaving a strong detachment to watch Breedt's Nek, was to skirt the northern side of the range and assail the Fusiliers. De la Rey, marching on the south side of the range, was to attack the main camp simultaneously from the west. Leaving Beyers for the moment, let us first follow De la Rey. At 3.45 A.M. on the 13th, his men, having left their horses in the rear, crept towards the ridge held by Legge's mounted infantry, opened fire and endeavoured to rush the pickets in the confusion of the first surprise. Nothing could have been finer than the manner in which this dangerous attack was met. A little picket of thirty men, fighting desperately, refused to give ground, and gave time for troops to be hurried up in support. The first shot had caused a ferment in Legge's camp; men and officers rushed out and ran singly or in groups to occupy the posts allotted to them in case of alarm. The gallant Legge, ever foremost in fighting, was one of the first on the scene, but in leading forward a small party to the succour of a picket was shot at forty yards' range and fell dead. He was carried

away by Lieutenant Dobree of Kitchener's Horse and Sergeant Reid of the Scottish Rifles, the latter of whom was killed while performing this brave act. The plucky defence of the pickets had permitted the arrival of reinforcements, including two guns of "P" Battery and a pom-pom; Colonel Cookson succeeded Legge, and after a short but bitter struggle at close range, the Boers sullenly withdrew.* Clements, who at the first alarm had galloped up from the main camp to the post of danger, was able to congratulate himself on the complete repulse of a very formidable attack. But a little later, at 5 A.M. or thereabouts, dropping shots were heard from the top of the mountain. Suddenly this fire increased; then it swelled to a sustained roar of musketry, which proved that the Fusiliers on the summit were hotly engaged. Beyers, who had been delayed by difficulties of ground, was just beginning his share of the joint attack.

The Fusilier position.

Regarded as a defensive shield for the pass, the Fusilier position suffered from defects which, at this date, were common to many British intrenched positions. A force of 308 officers and men, distributed over a series of weak sangars, covered a front of nearly two miles, whereas a few really strong fortified posts near the head of the pass would have defended that vital point more effectually. Such posts would have been commanded from higher ground (for the top of the range presented a series of false crests); but this weakness was not to be compared with that of the dispositions actually adopted. The scattered pickets stood on ground of great irregularity, strewn with huge boulders which restricted the British field of fire and afforded excellent cover to an assailant. These were exactly the conditions which gave full play to the superior field-craft of the Boers, and that, it must be remembered, was the dominant factor in engagements of the sort now at

* Civil Surgeon Englebach of the Yeomanry Hospital (killed); Captain Stevenson, R.A. (wounded); Brook of the Yorkshire L.I.; Robertson, Connaught Rangers; Myburg, of Kitchener's Horse; Clegg-Hill, of the Welsh Fusiliers (wounded); White, of the Scottish Rifles; and Sergeant Prince, of the Royal Scots, besides many others, showed distinguished courage on this occasion.

hand. But it is easy to be wise after the event, and if we would put ourselves fairly into the frame of mind of those responsible we must realise that, for four months past, these troops had been wearily tramping after Boers who always ran, and who seemed to have lost all spirit and initiative. This bred a certain amount of over-confidence which, in this case, was not dispelled by the news which caused Legge, at the foot of the mountain, to double his pickets on this night.

Beyers makes his attack.

Between 4.30 and 5 large numbers of the enemy appeared riding up through the scrub, scattering as the first bullets fell among them, and taking cover in the deep kloof which ran north from the head of the pass and separated the two sections of the defence. Here they left their horses and, in a bold and reckless fashion for which there was no precedent since the attack on Wagon Hill nearly a year earlier, and which was a startling novelty to all the troops present, rushed forward on foot, cheering and shouting as they ran. Kemp and Marais led the left, van Staden the right. Their strength was about 1,000, for, as previously arranged, 500 men had been left to hold Breedt's Nek. Van Staden fell with fury on the western section of the defence, held by "H" and "G" companies under Captain J. A. C. Somerville. All the pickets on this side were attacked by overwhelming numbers. Indifferent to loss, the Boers worked up through the rocks with great skill and dash, shot down most of the British officers, rolled up the pickets in succession from the west and, in spite of a stout resistance, mastered the whole of Somerville's position. Then they turned on the rear of the eastern section of defence. Here Yatman, with "E" and "F" companies, had already suffered severe loss under the vehement assaults of Kemp and Marais, his ammunition was running low, and when van Staden brought a cross fire to bear on the sangars his position became hopeless, and he surrendered. The Fusiliers had fought tenaciously against an enemy vastly superior in strength, and had lost in killed and wounded 97 officers and men—nearly a third of their number. Before 6 o'clock all opposition was at an end. Already, flushed with success, the Boers were hurrying

The position captured.

forward to the edge of the berg, whence the whole camp below burst into view.

When the attack from the north first began, measures had been taken, under Clements's orders, to reinforce the summit and hold the pass. Colonel Lambton, who had been left in camp, had sent up 50 Fife and Devon Yeomanry, and had ordered a company of Yorkshire L.I. and half a company of Fusiliers to hold the lower outlet. But the suddenness of the catastrophe and the nature of the ground rendered these steps nugatory. Lambton, indeed, directed the troops not to attempt to reach the summit, but to hold lower ground, an order which the Yeomanry do not seem to have understood. So narrow was the gut near the top that men had to move in single file; so that when the triumphant Boers reached the edge it was to see the Yeomanry, under Captains Purvis and Bolitho, toiling up in a long straggling *queue*. All that brave men could do to stem the tide the Yeomen did, resisting man by man as the Boers swarmed down the ravine. All the officers, including Captain Moody, Clements's A.D.C., who had joined the party, were shot down, and 27 of the small detachment were killed or wounded. Gathering momentum as they came, the Boers poured down, cut off half a company of Yorkshire L.I. at the mouth of the pass, taking 30 prisoners, and began to enter the camp, while from all points of vantage on the hill a destructive fire was poured upon the camp and the guns.

Attempts to hold the pass from below.

The pass lost.

The position of General Clements was now exceedingly grave. In casualties and prisoners he had lost a third of his force, and was on the point of losing his camp; his guns were in imminent danger, and the position he held was utterly indefensible. Should De la Rey resume his attack in co-operation with Beyers, the result could hardly be in doubt. Such moments call out the highest qualities of a commander, and Clements rose to the test. He re-formed the troops still at his disposal, ordered that all should rally upon Yeomanry Hill, and that as much of the transport as could be saved should be parked in rear of that hill. As bullets were sweeping the whole camp, and as many of the

Clements withdraws his force steadily.

natives had bolted and the teams were in confusion, the order to move the transport was a hard one to execute. Nevertheless, by the splendid exertions of individual officers and men, a certain proportion was saved, and, after waiting an hour and a half, until everything possible had been done, Clements gave the order to fall back. The movement was covered by the whole of the artillery, by Captain Sir Elliott Lees's squadron of Dorset Yeomanry and some of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, who held for some hours a long rocky ridge between the camps and Yeomanry Hill, and by Legge's M.I., who, under the command of Cookson, still maintained their old position.

Fine behaviour of the artillery.

It was during this period of the engagement that the artillery particularly distinguished itself. The 4·7 gun under Major Inglefield, "P" Battery under Major Sir G. Thomas, the 8th Battery under Major Chance and the pom-pom under Captain Stevenson, all rendered excellent service. Stubbornly contesting every yard of ground and constantly exposed to a damaging rifle-fire, the artillery retired slowly, section by section or gun by gun, along many different routes towards Yeomanry Hill. One of the "P" guns, under Lieutenant Nevill, had its whole detachment shot down and was saved only by the exertions of a volunteer party of Cookson's M.I. One of the last guns to withdraw was the big 4·7 from its emplacement near the camp. Here the fire was so fierce that the oxen could not be inspanned, so that the gun, with the assistance of its escort of Fusiliers, had to be man-handled out of action until it reached a spot which was less exposed.*

The troops concentrate at Yeomanry Hill.

By 8.45 A.M., thanks to cool leading and universal gallantry, all the troops, save Cookson's screen on the west front, had been safely withdrawn to Yeomanry Hill, and Clements was now able to order Cookson to follow. Since the men had left their horses in camp, where the lines were under close-range musketry fire, it was found impossible to save more than a small number. Most of the wagons, stores, and ammunition belonging to this

* Captain Thornhill, of the Edinburgh Art. Militia, attached to the R.G.A., rendered good service on this occasion.

part of the force fell also into the hands of the enemy. Most of the men retreated on foot, and the last to come in were the party of Kitchener's Horse which had held the important kopje on the extreme left of the screen. It was 10.30 A.M. when the troops were all assembled at Yeomanry Hill. Another good soldier, Macbean of the Dublins, Clements's Brigade-Major, had been struck down at his general's side. Save for the New South Wales Medical Corps, under Surgeons Green and van Niekerk, which, despite the fire of friends and foes, maintained its position and worked devotedly, the whole camp had been abandoned.

The retreat.

It was only now that De la Rey's force tardily began to renew pressure, opening fire with two guns upon Yeomanry Hill. The British guns were promptly in action and quickly subdued the fire, but the enemy's shells had caused a panic among the transport, which started off at a gallop to the east and was headed back with difficulty. Despite his critical situation Clements stood firm for four hours longer, and by his bold front imposed upon the enemy. In spite of the impassioned exhortations of De la Rey, the Boers, who had suffered what for them was heavy loss, could not be induced to follow a foe of such resolute demeanour. Beyers, moreover, who had been the hardest hit, had left his horses at the top of the range, while his men, having entered the camp in procession singing hymns, were too intent upon looting and burning to pursue with any energy. It was only at 2.30 P.M. that Clements decided to retire upon Rietfontein, 23 miles distant, and at 3.15 the movement began. Colonel Cookson commanded the rear-guard, composed of the Yeomanry under Lieut.-Colonel Brown, with some guns. Saving some slight annoyance from the rear and right flank the retreat was without incident, and the column arrived at Rietfontein early on the morning of the 14th. It had suffered a loss in killed, wounded and prisoners, of 637 men. The Boer casualties were about a hundred.

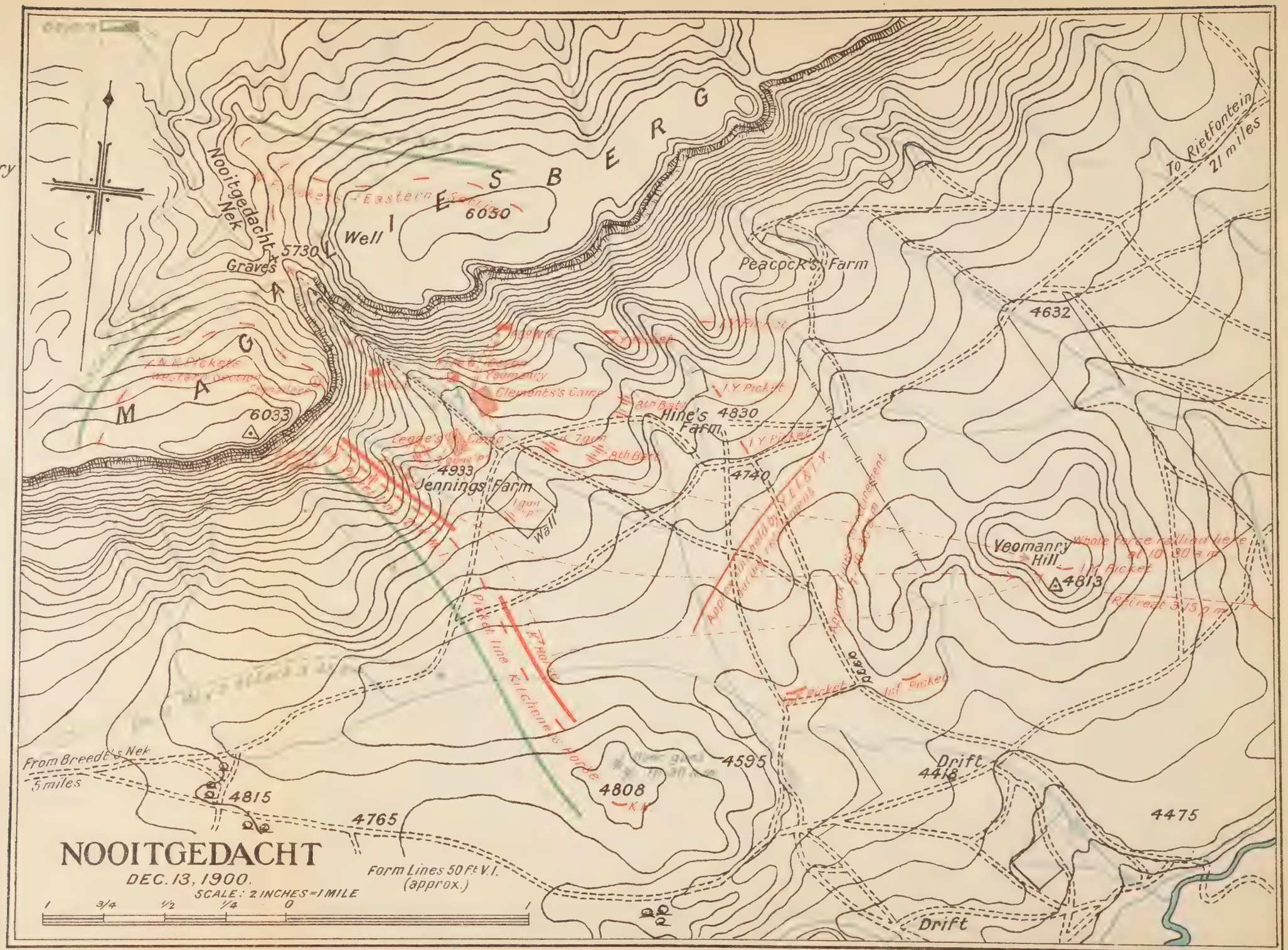
Broadwood's action, Dec. 13.

In the exciting events of the 13th Broadwood had taken no part. Encamped at Oorzak, 15 miles away, he had not heard the first rifle-fire owing to the intervening

mountains, and had been vainly endeavouring to open communication by heliograph, when lyddite shells, bursting on the top of the berg, gave him the first warning that an action was in progress. This was at 6.45, and at 7 he marched five miles to Buffelspoort, and remained there until midday, mending a telegraph line. Here he was seven miles north by west from Nooitgedacht, and the same distance north of Breedt's Nek. Hitherto he had assumed that Clements had been fighting De la Rey only, and that the action was of no more consequence than scores of others which had occurred in the last three months. Though it is true that the wholesome rule of marching direct to the sound of the guns admits of many exceptions, Broadwood's assumption in this case seems to have been made too lightly; for on the 11th he had been warned of a Boer move from the north; he knew that a convoy had recently been overwhelmed, that Clements had been forced to postpone co-operation owing to lack of men, and that his own signals in the early morning had received no answer. But at noon light broke on the situation. Broadwood received news that Clements had been attacked by two forces, De la Rey's and a "force from the north"; while his own spies informed him that this "force from the north" had been in the Kromrivier valley (close to Breedt's Nek) on the night before, and that a part of it still held the pass. It may fairly be held that this intelligence should have decided Broadwood, most of whose men were mounted, to march at once to Nooitgedacht. Instead he moved eastward a few miles to Eland's Drift, on a report which proved to be false, that Beyers had left his wagons there. Near this point he laagered in the evening. Had he marched to the battlefield, whether at 7 A.M. or later, it is unlikely that he could have altered the fortunes of the day. Certainly he could not have saved the Fusiliers, and, with Beyers holding the crest, it is doubtful if the cavalry could have ascended the northern slopes. But he could know nothing of the course of the fight until he reached the scene of action, nor did any pressing duty require his presence elsewhere. At midday, if not at 7, it was a clear case for following the old military tradition. Whatever the result, co-operation on an

DIRECTIONS

N.F. Northumberland Fusiliers
Y.L.I. King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
I.Y. Imperial Yeomanry
K.H. Kitchener's Horse
2nd M.I. 2nd Battn Mounted Infantry.



occasion such as this would have raised our prestige in the eyes of the Boers, and heightened the spirit of the army. But, again, in order to judge Broadwood fairly, we must bear in mind that the Boer revival came like a bolt from the blue, falsifying all prophecy. The Boers had been resting; Broadwood had been in the field continuously for a year, and for four months had been engaged in that sort of unprofitable work which is apt to make the best men grow stale.

Further comments on the action.

In the whole of this unfortunate affair we must make allowance for the same element of surprise. Clements had a perfect right to count on receiving warning, either from Broadwood or from the central intelligence, of any Boer diversion from the north. He also had just right to complain of abstractions from his force. But had he realised the new fountain of aggressive energy which was welling up among the Boers, he certainly would not, on any consideration, have encamped for five days in the position chosen at Nooitgedacht. It was a thoroughly bad position, whose retention for the whole column could scarcely be justified by the necessity of maintaining a helio post on the summit of the range. But for this over-confidence the same rumours which had impelled him to stretch the chains of discipline almost to breaking-point in his effort to get more troops, culminating in the report received on the 12th that there was a large force at Breedt's Nek, would have bred misgivings as to his position. At Breedt's Nek a hostile force, from whatsoever direction it had come, was in a position to threaten him either from the north or the south. On the north he was eminently vulnerable, for the loss of the mountain-crest, even if unaccompanied by an attack from the south, would place a force below, however strong, under crushing disadvantages. With 300 men intrenched, Clements, no doubt, thought the crest secure; but again, had he suspected the new Boer *élan*, he would have devoted more personal attention to this important point, where the troops, for all intents and purposes, were isolated, and where the defences were unscientific. So much having been said, it is almost superfluous to add that, when once

the surprise had occurred, Clements showed moral and tactical qualities of the highest order. In the face of superior numbers flushed by success he steadily withdrew the residue of his force and saved the whole of his artillery. His orderly retirement and the prolonged stand at Yeomanry Hill are models of cool and resolute conduct under the most trying circumstances.

The skill and decision of the Boer leaders against whom Clements was pitted came out strongly in this action. They saw the weak point of his position, and struck accordingly with lightning promptitude; struck, moreover, in such a way that the British superiority in guns was completely neutralised. Their success at Nooitgedacht, like all their successes during the guerilla war, owed nothing to shell-fire and everything to rifle-fire. If they had been able to enforce discipline throughout, to silence laments for losses and to drag off their men from the secondary object of loot, they might have given Clements considerably more trouble.

Reform in the Intelligence Department.

The supervision of intelligence duties in South Africa had never received the attention it deserved. That the original report of Beyers's march from Warmbaths should have gone to Paget before reaching Pretoria showed the preposterous anomalies of which the system was capable. Happily the department was soon greatly to improve in the hands of Major David Henderson, whom Kitchener, when he assumed command, appointed to control it. But past neglect could not be made good in a day, and some time elapsed before the Intelligence became a useful adjunct to the campaign. Paradoxical as it may seem, the effect was not wholly good. Scouting was already poor enough on the British side, and, with the improvement of organised departmental intelligence, tended to become worse. The reader will have noticed that throughout the events leading up to Nooitgedacht every one relied for intelligence on spies, generally native spies. Although Clements was for four days within five miles of De la Rey, he was not in close military touch with him, otherwise he might, perhaps, have known more of the reasons for De la Rey's march to Boschfontein than could possibly be provided by ignorant Kaffirs.

Leads to still less reliance on scouting.

Neither did Broadwood, on the 11th, reconnoitre the country for Beyers in any thorough military sense. We have not hitherto mentioned the matter because it would be unfair to single out these officers for a laxity common to nearly every column-commander in South Africa, and largely due to the present dearth of mounted troops. But it is necessary to point out that this reliance on adventitious sources, valuable in their way, but always needing to be supplemented by skilled field-scouting, was becoming inveterate.

French and Clements march against De la Rey, Dec. 16.

Though rumour credited the Boers with the intention of attacking Krugersdorp on Dingaan's Day, De la Rey made no such attempt to follow up his success. A few days later he and Beyers moved seven miles south-east and took up a position on the Thorndale-Hekpoort heights. On the British side retaliatory measures were set on foot with promptitude. French was placed in charge of the whole of the operations north and south of the Magaliesberg; troops poured into Rietfontein and Krugersdorp, and, on December 16, two days after his retreat, Clements once more took the field, moving out to Schierpoort with a column of 3,200 men and 15 guns.* French, with a strong column, including Gordon's 1st Cavalry Brigade and 1,000 infantry, left Krugersdorp at 3 A.M. on the 19th, and directed Clements to join with him in a converging movement upon De la Rey's position, the aim being to cut off the Boers from Breedt's Nek and drive them back upon an impassable portion of the Magaliesberg. Clements seized Yeomanry Hill at 6.30 A.M. on the 19th, and at 9.30 pressed on westward. Threatened by Clements from the east and French from the south, the Boers hastily left their position and galloped for Breedt's Nek. Here French had intended to forestall them, but he was too late.

The Boers escape and De la Rey and Beyers part company, Dec. 19–20.

De la Rey's men, to the number of 2,000, streamed across his front, gained the Boschfontein kopjes, fronting the mouth of the Nek, and there, strongly posted, stood at bay. At 11 heavy rain began, obstructing the progress of the columns for the rest of the day. On the 20th, French prepared to attack, but the Boers had quietly marched off, Beyers to the

* Including Alderson's M.I. (900 strong, and "I" Batt. R.H.A.), the Border Regt., 1st Inniskilling Fus., and 2nd Worcester Regiment.

south-west and De la Rey to the west. No such opportunity occurred again.

Changes in command.

French now sent Clements to the north of the Magaliesberg, where he operated till the middle of January, when his column was transferred to Cunningham, and Clements himself succeeded General Tucker in the command at Pretoria. Tucker, in his turn, succeeded Hunter, who was invalided home, in the command at Bloemfontein.

Further British efforts, Dec. 26–31.

To the south of the Magaliesberg, redoubled efforts were made to cope with De la Rey and Beyers. All French's mobile columns, under Gordon (who took over the Krugersdorp column), Babington and Kekewich,* were thrown into the field, and Broadwood was brought down from Rustenburg to co-operate. On December 26, the four columns, with a strength of 5,600 men and 40 guns, swept towards Ventersdorp on a wide front. But the nimble Boer forces easily evaded this imposing array. At the end of the month French made a fresh combination. Colonel Eustace Knox, of the 18th Hussars, took Broadwood's place, and Broadwood's column was given a much-needed rest. A new column was formed under Colonel Pulteney, of the Scots Guards, Gordon's was reconstituted, and the four columns of Babington, Kekewich, Pulteney and Gordon, including altogether some 2,000 mounted men, were placed under the command of Babington.† Ventersdorp, which was to form a new advanced base, was fortified and garrisoned by 300 men,‡ under Colonel Gilbert Hamilton.

Action of Cyferfontein, Jan. 2, 1901.

Outclassed in generalship, mobility and scouting, the British columns were unable to tackle their elusive enemy except on his own terms. On January 2 the fourfold

* Colonel R. G. Kekewich succeeded Major-General Douglas on December 25.

† *Gordon's Column*:—3 sq. Scots Greys, 1 sq. Carabiniers, 500 Scots Guards, "T" Batt. R.H.A., 1 Elswick gun.

Pulteney's Column:—Inniskilling Dragoons (Major Allenby); 1 sq. 14th Hussars, 500 Scots Guards, 4 guns R.H.A., 2 guns R.F.A., 1 howitzer.

Kekewich's Column:—2nd Brigade Rhodesian Field Force (550), 4 cos. 2nd Somerset L.I., 2 guns 88th Batt., 1 howitzer, 2 pom-poms.

Babington's Column:—Imp. Light Horse, 300; 1 sq. 14th Hussars; 64 M.I.; 75 I.Y. (19th Co.); 1st Royal Welsh Fus., 420; 4 guns 78th Batt.

‡ L. N. Lancashires, 146; R. Welsh Fus., 71; I. L. H., 42.

force moved in line from Ventersdorp to the north, and on the 5th came into sudden contact with De la Rey and 700 men at Cyferfontein, fourteen miles south-east of Olifant's Nek. De la Rey, while feinting openly towards his right, had concealed his main body among the long grass of a rolling hill to his left. Somewhat at haphazard, Babington ordered the I.L.H. to gallop over and occupy this hill. The Boers made no sign. A troop of the 14th Hussars moving wide on the flank was allowed to pass the hill uninterfered with, and the I.L.H., who, unfortunately, took no precautions of their own to reconnoitre their front, fell into the ambush. The Boers sprang from the grass, and before Colonel Woolls-Sampson could extricate his regiment, which he did in gallant style, 2 officers and 46 men were killed or wounded, and 70 horses killed. Colonel Grey, with all the available mounted men, now brought pressure to bear on the Boer right and right rear. Threatened with envelopment, De la Rey made off rapidly to the north-west, hotly pursued for seven or eight miles by Grey.

Beyers leaves the Western Transvaal, Jan. 10–12, 1901.

Beyers, meanwhile, undeterred by his narrow escape in December, had slipped back into the Hekpoort valley. Endeavouring to repeat the former manœuvre, Kitchener brought down Paget, who had returned to his work in the north, by way of Commando Nek to Schierpoort, where, on January 10, he threatened Beyers from the east. With Babington afoot in the west, Beyers decided on a change of scene and trekked away eastward with 1,200 men and several guns. He passed round Paget's left and on the night of the 11th laagered, with some hardihood, ten miles north of the garrison of Johannesburg, to whom his presence remained unknown. Pretoria and Johannesburg, thirty miles apart, were both occupied in strength, and the stations on the railway running between them were also well defended. An attempt to traverse this line required some audacity; yet Beyers determined to cross between Kaalfontein and Zuurfontein, and to attack both stations. Zuurfontein was held by detachments of the Norfolk and Lincolnshire regiments under the command of Captain Cordeaux of the Lincolns; Kaalfontein by some Cheshire M.I. and details of various

corps, temporarily under Lieutenant Williams-Freeman. On the early morning of the 12th, Beyers approached the line at a point two miles south of Kaalfontein, blew up the line, and proceeded to pass across it a long train of wagons. At the same time he attacked Kaalfontein in considerable force and shelled the station with vigour, but met with a firm resistance. Against Zuurfontein he sent a smaller party, which overwhelmed a patrol, captured an outlying post and after some obstinate fighting with other posts, retired baffled. Under cover of these diversions the passage of the line was tranquilly effected. A small column of 400 men sent out by Barton from Germiston reached Zuurfontein at noon; from Johannesburg Knox's 2nd Cavalry Brigade, 750 strong, followed shortly. It was not till 1.30, however, that Beyers ceased to bombard Kaalfontein, and then withdrew to the east under a far from vigorous pursuit.

Smuts takes the field, mid-January.

Although the partnership of Beyers and De la Rey had been broken up, neither had been defeated, and the fame of Nooitgedacht, together with the ease with which the two leaders had evaded reprisals, encouraged many more Boers to take the field in the west. Nor were succeeding events calculated to damp the spirit of resistance. By the middle of January so many recruits had thronged to the flag that De la Rey was able to organize a force of 700 men for independent work under J. C. Smuts. The young lawyer, who was destined to have a distinguished career in the guerilla war, gathered his force in the district west of Ventersdorp and trekked east for the Gatsrand, where we shall soon hear of him again.

Cunningham versus De la Rey, Jan. 23-25.

In the meantime Cunningham had been ordered by French to leave a garrison at Rustenburg and to move south through Olifant's Nek, there to take position in order to prevent De la Rey from moving eastward. Crossing the Nek on January 23, Cunningham gained touch with the enemy at Middelfontein, seven miles from the summit of the pass. At the moment De la Rey was some distance to the west and Cunningham was opposed with no little audacity by 500 men under Potgieter of Wolmaransstad, a leader who was to gain fame in the last month of the war for a

charge of brilliant audacity which cost him his life. On this occasion, after some obstinate fighting, during which half a company of the Worcesters under Captain Maitland carried a position with the bayonet, the Boers were forced to give way. Cunningham, though it was still early in the day, chose an unfortunate position for his camp in a valley dominated on every side by rocky hills. By the next day De la Rey himself had appeared on the scene with another 500 men, and at 4.45 A.M. attacked and captured an M.I. picket holding a detached kopje. After this he fired on the British force from all points of the compass until darkness fell. Cunningham, whose loss during the two days was 54 killed and wounded, could make no progress, and it was only on the 25th, when a relief column was sent by Babington from Ventersdorp, that he was able to get into motion and to march towards Krugersdorp to re-provision his force. The whole affair was a remarkable example of the extent to which light guerilla bands can obstruct and paralyse heavy regular forces. Babington now took post at Naauwpoort, an exceedingly strong position on the Witwatersberg, commanding the narrow valley which separates that range from the Magaliesberg. He had chosen it himself as the key to the district, and there he remained watching De la Rey, who for some time to come underwent no molestation.

Alarming news from the Gatsrand, Jan. 29.

Cunningham was approaching Krugersdorp when alarming news came from the Gatsrand hills. Smuts, marching east, had crossed the Schoon Spruit on the night of January 17, and reaching the Gatsrand a few days later had been joined by Liebenberg and the Potchefstroom commando, 600 strong.* Another band from the Losberg under Breytenbach was already in this neighbourhood. At Modderfontein Nek, where the road from Krugersdorp, 22 miles distant, climbs up into the range, isolated and well-nigh forgotten in the close neighbourhood of this dangerous concentration, stood a small British post of 109 South Wales Borderers, under

* This commando had been heard of by Babington (at Ventersdorp) on the 17th, and Colonel Grey in a well-managed reconnaissance on that day had surprised the Boers and inflicted a loss of about a dozen men.

Captain Casson, which served no useful purpose and offered a tempting prize to the enemy.

Explanatory digression.

In order to explain the error which allowed this post to be overwhelmed it is necessary for a moment to widen our horizon. Not only in the Western Transvaal but in every part of the field of war, the month of January was one of emergency and strain. Botha and Viljoen, as we shall see presently, had produced an intolerable situation in the Eastern Transvaal; Cape Colony was aflame, and de Wet was preparing a fresh invasion. In the process of meeting these emergencies French was withdrawn from his district on the 17th and directed against Botha; Colonel Haig, his capable staff officer, had been ordered away to Cape Colony; Hart, who knew the district well, and had worked it very successfully, was relieved at Krugersdorp on the 29th by Colonel Grove and was sent into the Free State; while Clements, as we have recorded, had been given the command at Pretoria. Thus most of the men who knew the district best had been almost simultaneously withdrawn.

Magniac's convoy reaches Modderfontein, Jan. 29.

At 4 A.M. on January 29 a convoy bearing a month's supplies left Krugersdorp for Modderfontein under an escort of 108 men,* commanded by Captain H. Magniac of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry. The mistake which had caused the loss of the convoy at Buffelspoort was repeated here; for, although Boers in force were known to be in the Gatsrand, the convoy was despatched without any warning to the officer commanding the garrison and without any regard for the general situation. Casson, commanding at Modderfontein, learnt only at 9 A.M. that the convoy was approaching, and at once sent all the men he could spare to secure its safe arrival. This covering party under Lieutenant Crawley effected its junction with Magniac, and the two officers succeeded in bringing the convoy into camp, but only with the utmost difficulty and under repeated assaults from Breytenbach, who was the first to appear upon the scene. Crawley himself was severely wounded.

Attack and capture of Modderfontein, Jan. 29–31.

The Boers now invested and attacked Modderfontein. Smuts and Liebenberg were summoned, and by midday on

* S. Wales Borderers, 80; Marshall's Horse, 20; Imp. Yeo., 25.

the 30th a large force with two guns was besieging the little post, now held by about 200 men. Here, again, the almost unlimited possibilities of fortification had been neglected. Tools had been lacking. The sangars and trenches were inadequate in themselves and gave little mutual support. Magniac's men had to build their own under fire. All through the day and night of the 30th firing continued. One determined assault was repulsed, but at 1.30 A.M. on the 31st, in heavy rain and black darkness, the enemy began to storm the advanced posts. There was no regular surrender. The troops were simply overborne by numbers. Resistance ceased at 4.30 A.M. after a fight of 43 hours, during which the garrison lost 26 killed and wounded. As in the case of Dewetsdorp, the measures taken to relieve the place were not prompt. Colonel Grove heard of the attack on the 29th and telegraphed to Cunningham, who was approaching Krugersdorp, to send mounted troops and guns to Casson's relief. At 10 A.M. on the 30th, Cunningham's column reached Krugersdorp, but in spite of urgent orders from Pretoria, it was not until 11.30 P.M. that a column of four guns and 1,000 men (half of them infantry supplied by Grove) started for Modderfontein under the command of Colonel Roche. When Roche neared the scene of action at 7 A.M. on the 31st, the post had fallen, and Smuts was holding a strong position on the Modderfontein ridge. Roche fell back to Gemsbokfontein, and was joined there at 6 P.M. by Cunningham with the main body of the column.

Cunningham attacks Smuts at Modderfontein, Feb. 2.

With 2,600 men, of whom barely 800 were mounted, and ten guns, Cunningham started at 4 A.M. on February 2 to attack the Modderfontein position, which Smuts now held with 1,500 men and two guns. A frontal attack by the infantry met with a fierce fire and was not seriously pressed. Cunningham endeavoured, therefore, while holding the enemy in front, to turn his right with 800 mounted troops, who were placed under the command of Major Scott, R.H.A. But this weak force was held up by Smuts without difficulty, and in the evening Cunningham withdrew with 40 casualties to his bivouac of the previous night. On the 4th, he retired to Roodepoort, on the railway east of Krugersdorp.

Methuen in the far west, Dec.–Jan.

In the far western area Methuen with his reduced force had been almost entirely occupied in the harassing duty of supplying the garrisons of his large district. Lemmer, with the Lichtenburg commando, still gave constant trouble, but on December 9 this brave leader fell in an action with Lieut.-Colonel Money who was conducting a convoy to Lichtenburg. On the 14th, Lemmer's successor, Vermaas, was located at Varkfontein, near Lichtenburg. Methuen led out two columns against him, and in the course of a running fight Major von Donop, R.A., leading the Composite Bushmen Regiment, captured the Boer convoy. These were the only encounters which need special notice. On December 24, in consequence of disquieting reports from Griqualand West, Methuen's command was extended to the south as far as Kimberley. After withdrawing the garrison of Ottoshoop and filling up Zeerust and Lichtenburg with six months' supplies, Methuen went by rail to the south and on January 9 was at Schweizer Reneke. This much-besieged garrison also was withdrawn. Kuruman and Daniel's Kuil were retained and provisioned, and towards the end of the month Methuen remained near Taungs, ready to proceed to Cape Colony in case his presence was required for the dangerous situation now existing in that quarter.

II

The Outbreak in the Eastern Transvaal

Attacks begin in the far south-east, Dec. 1900.

Leaving the Western Transvaal in this unsatisfactory condition, we now turn to the east, where Louis Botha and Ben Viljoen, the former to the south and the latter to the north of the Delagoa Railway, had both been actively engaged in the general offensive revival. It was upon Hildyard's garrisons at Utrecht, Wakkerstroom and Vryheid in the far south-east that the storm first broke. In the first days of December the local commandos, which had been recuperating quietly at Piet Retief, came down in force under Louis Botha, Chris Botha, Oppermann, Cherry Emmett and Lukas Meyer to test the efficiency of Hildyard's defences. On the 2nd, Captain Butler of the Dorsets, with 75 men of the

Utrecht garrison, engaged 200 Boers near that place, and on the 6th, the Wakkerstroom garrison * was shelled for two hours by a high velocity gun and a pom-pom. But these small affairs were only the preliminaries to a serious attack upon Vryheid. The garrison,† about 900 strong, was under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Gawne, commanding the 2nd Royal Lancaster Regt. Two hundred of the troops occupied the town itself, which was never seriously threatened. The main position, held by 550 of the Royal Lancasters under Major G. A. Carleton, was Lancaster Hill, a plateau to the north of the town 1,000 feet high and having a perimeter of defence four miles in extent. A mile to the west of Lancaster Hill and 400 feet below it a company of the 5th Division M.I. occupied a smaller plateau. Yet another mile to the north-west, on an isolated kopje crowned with a little stone fort, was a detached post of 21 M.I. In the night of December 11th, 1,200 Boers came down from the north by the road from Piet Retief and approached Vryheid, where long immunity from attack had bred negligence. The detached post of M.I. was overpowered and captured without a single shot. From it the Boers crept stealthily towards the M.I. plateau, passed between the outposts, which were too few and too far apart, and at 2.15 A.M., in the faint glimmer of the rising moon, opened fire and rushed the M.I. camp, stampeding the horses and causing the utmost confusion. Happily some brave young officers kept their heads and set a fine example of firmness. Lieutenant Woodgate, coming out of his tent, was summoned to surrender and refusing to do so was shot down. Lieutenant Markes rallied a score of his men and twice attacked the enemy with the bayonet, but met with such a severe cross-fire that he was forced to withdraw to the edge of the plateau. He took post at the point where the road begins its steep descent to the town, and here at 3 A.M. he was joined by Lieutenant Meredith. At daybreak Lieut.-Colonel

Attack on Vryheid, Dec. 11–12.

Map p. 118.

M.I. plateau rushed.

* Wakkerstroom:—½ co. 5th Div. M.I.; two 12-pdrs.; 4 cos. Dorsetshire Regt.

† Vryheid:—One co. 5th Div. M.I. (Lanc. Fusiliers and Royal Lancasters), two 12-pdrs., six cos. 2nd Royal Lancasters.

Gawne, who as yet had hardly realised the serious nature of the attack, brought up half a company of the Lancasters, under Captain J. A. Paton, and planted it close to Markes. Here the two parties maintained themselves throughout the day, thwarting all attempts of the enemy to approach Lancaster Hill from the south-west. Gawne now mounted the hill, but in so doing this brave officer fell mortally wounded.

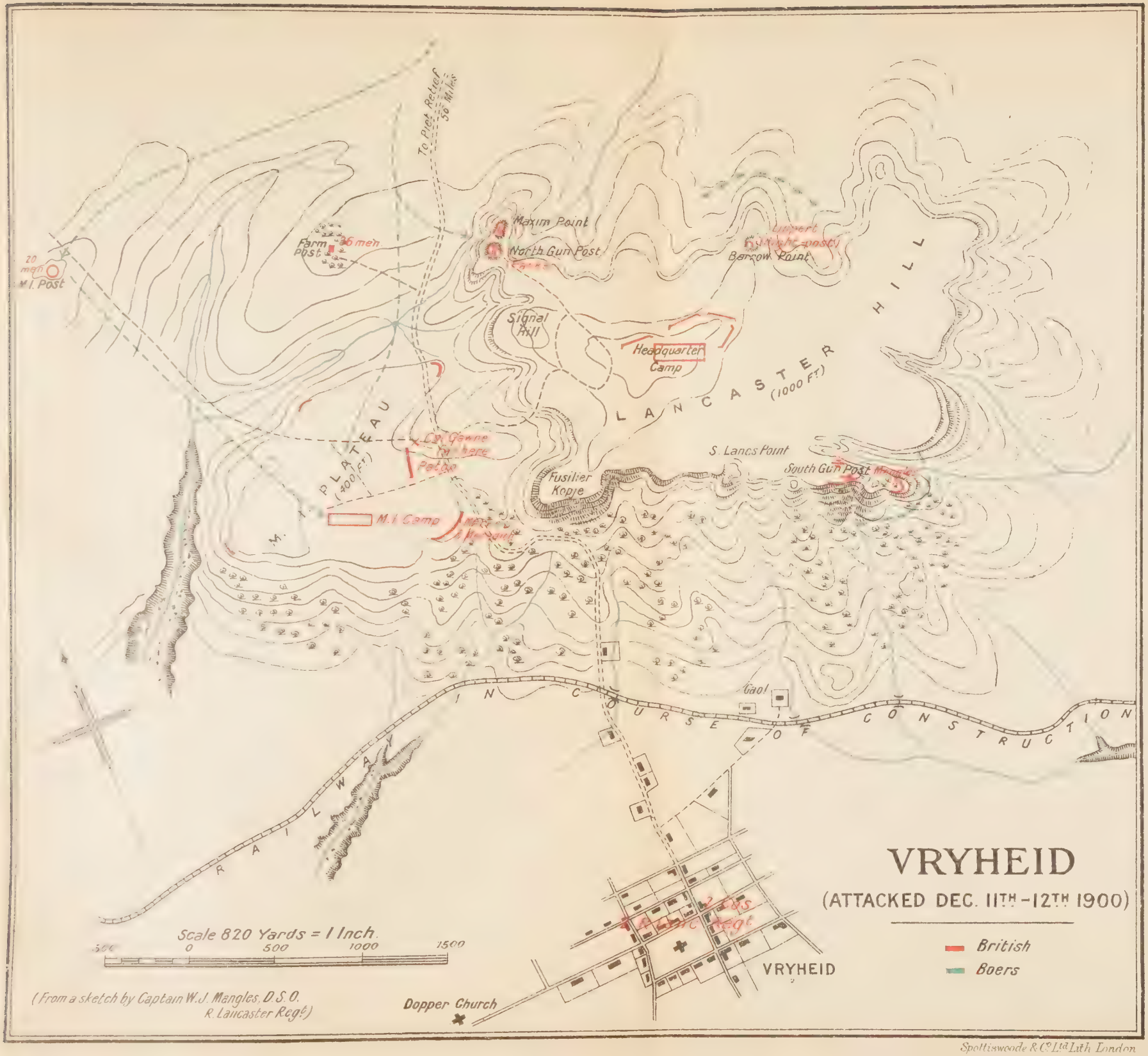
Defence of Lancaster Hill.

Major Carleton, commanding on Lancaster Hill, succeeded Gawne and directed the defence for the rest of the day. At 3.30 A.M. the Boers approached his position and endeavoured to rush the North Gun post at Maxim Point, but becoming entangled in the barbed wire and meeting with a hot fire, fell back in disorder. By 4 A.M. firing was general on all sides and several determined but futile assaults were delivered. One of the warmest corners was the South Gun position, where Captain Mangles of the Royal Lancasters and Lieutenant Drought, R.G.A., had built excellent fortifications and held them with marked bravery. The name of Lieutenant Lippert, who was killed at Barrow Point, also deserves particular mention. It was not until 7 P.M. that the last sniper drew off and the attack came to an end after a total loss to the Vryheid garrison of 9 killed, 20 wounded and 30 missing. Four days later Colonel Blomfield, commanding the Dundee sub-district, arrived with a column and convoy from Dundee. He was opposed somewhat slackly by 400 Boers at Scheeper's Nek, and routed them with ease. On Christmas night a second attempt was made upon Utrecht by a body of 300 local Boers; but the garrison,* 673 strong, under Major A. J. Chapman of the Dublin Fusiliers, had full warning of the impending attack, and repelled it without difficulty.

The south-east becomes quiet.

Hildyard's garrisons now entered on a period of comparative peace. Satisfied with their exploits, such as they had been, the south-eastern commandos settled down just out of reach and confined themselves to measures of petty annoyance. Many of the best men, however, led by Chris Botha and Oppermann, rode off to the north in the wake of the

* Utrecht:—One 12-pdr., six cos. York and Lancaster, R. Lancaster, and Middlesex regiments, and 60 M.I.



VRYHEID

(ATTACKED DEC. 11TH – 12TH 1900)

(From a sketch by Captain W.J. Mangles, D.S.O. R. Lancaster Regt)

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

Commandant-General, who, in concert with Ben Viljoen, was hatching an enterprise of some magnitude against Lyttelton's garrisons on the Delagoa Railway.

Action of South Rand Mine, Dec. 26.

Before we turn in this direction, there remains to be described an incident which happened on December 26, a few hours after the attack on Utrecht, but 120 miles distant from that town. In connection with past and future events it helps to show how universal was the new spirit of offence among the Transvaal Boers. Colonel Colville's column of 1,400 men * had been occupied during December in clearing farms between Standerton and Heidelberg. There were constant petty skirmishes, culminating on the 26th in an affair of more serious moment. On this day, Captain C. E. Radclyffe's company of the Rifle Brigade and a pom-pom were left in camp at the South Rand Mine, twelve miles west of Greylingstad, while the rest of the column left at 7 A.M. to raid farms in the vicinity. A commando of Heidelbergers, about 600 strong, under Commandant Buys, had concentrated in the neighbourhood, and while Buys with 200 active skirmishers occupied the attention of Colville, who had only the miserable allowance of 50 mounted men, the rest of the Boer force, under Trichardt, fell upon Radclyffe's small detachment at the camp.

Radclyffe had posted Lieutenant Innes, with a party of 50 servants and employés, to hold the mine compound where the transport was parked, and went forward himself with the 90 riflemen and Harvest's pom-pom, to some rising ground 1,000 yards to the north-west. The Boers, knowing that they could not afford to waste time in preliminaries, galloped up and attacked the ridge in front and flank with great vigour, while others worked round towards the compound. Realising that he was greatly outnumbered, Radclyffe ordered the transport to inspan and trek away towards Colville, and to give it time to effect this movement, he himself clung obstinately to the ridge and Innes to the compound. Lying out in the open without a vestige of cover, Radclyffe's party suffered heavily. The pom-pom was soon in difficulties and

* 1st Rifle Brigade (1,000), two troops 13th Hussars, 4 guns 63rd Batt. R.F.A., 2 pom-poms ("O" sect.).

had to be withdrawn by hand. Harvest and three of his men were wounded, and five riflemen who assisted him were all struck down; but Sergeant Clery, R.A., finally succeeded in hooking in his horse and getting the gun away. Among the infantry men fell fast. Radclyffe and his subaltern, White, were both badly hit, and 38 others were killed or wounded. Seeing that the position was desperate, Radclyffe now gave orders that the unwounded men should endeavour to regain the compound, but only a few succeeded in getting through the Boers, who had now closed in on both flanks of the company. At the compound, Innes held on stoutly and covered the retreat of the baggage. At last the guns of the returning column were heard, and at 3.30 P.M. the Boers beat a retreat. Out of 140 men engaged in this very plucky defence, 61 had been killed or wounded. Colville himself had been warmly engaged on the road back and had lost 17 men.

Botha's plans, end of December.

After the attack upon Vryheid, General Louis Botha had gone off northward to rouse and organise those stout fighters of the "high veld," the commandos of the Ermelo, Carolina and South Middelburg districts. As we have already mentioned, many of the burghers of Piet Retief, Utrecht and Wakkerstroom rode up to join this fresh concentration. Viljoen, from the north-east, was to co-operate; but a few days before the arrangement of a scheme for concerted action, Viljoen struck an independent blow of his own.

Ben Viljoen and the Transvaal Government, Nov.–Dec.

After the action of Rhenoster Kop on November 29, he and Müller had thrown off Paget and had retreated to the mountains of the Lydenburg district. It was here, in a farm named Paardeplaats on the summit of the Tautesberg, that the Transvaal Government had taken up its official abode. Pietersburg, their previous refuge in the far north, still remained a military base of some importance, but for purposes of communication it was inconveniently far from the scene of fighting. At the Tautesberg, Mr. Schalk Burger could maintain constant touch with Louis Botha, Viljoen, and the commandos of the Eastern Transvaal, and through them with all the burgher forces in South Africa. Even from Europe occasional budgets of news were received.

Map of Government track, end of volume.

Finding himself undisturbed throughout December, Viljoen decided at the end of the month to strike at one of the many British garrisons which lay to the south and east of him. He chose Helvetia post, a link of the chain of fortified positions which, under the general control of General W. Kitchener, ran at right angles to the Delagoa Railway from Machadodorp, northward to Lydenburg. Since Helvetia was only three miles from Zwart Kopjes, the next post to the north, and six miles from the railway garrisons of Machadodorp, Waterval Boven and Waterval Onder, besides being within easy reach of Belfast and Lydenburg, the plan for cutting it out under the eyes of all these places, required boldness in design and skill in execution.

Viljoen decides to attack Helvetia.

Helvetia was commanded by Major Cotton of the 1st Liverpools, with a garrison of four weak companies from that battalion numbering 198 officers and men, together with 25 men of the 19th Hussars, and 22 gunners in charge of a 4·7 gun. A chain of four small hills was held, with a number of outlying trenches to the north, surrounded by wire entanglements. The key to the whole position was a strong work on Gun Hill, the easternmost of the heights. Here were the reserves of ammunition and rations, and here stood the 4·7 gun and 100 infantry and gunners, the whole under the command of an artillery captain. King's Kopje, at the western extremity, was held by 47 infantrymen under Major Wilkinson, and the remaining defences, with the headquarters' camp a little to the east of South Hill, are shown in detail on the map. With proper vigilance and discipline, the post should have been able to defy attack for a considerable time, and Gun Hill, at least, should have been secure. On the night of December 28, Viljoen, with 700 men of the Boksburg and Johannesburg commandos and Johannesburg Police, started from Windhoek, twenty miles north-west of Helvetia, traversed the Steenkampsberg, dropped down into Dullstroom, and thence approached the British position. Müller, always at the post of greatest danger, was ordered to assault Gun Hill from the south and east; W. Viljoen was to attack the northern intrenchments and headquarters' camp; while to prevent

Capture of Helvetia, Dec. 28–29.

Map p. 126.

interference from outside, Myburg, with a third detachment, was to threaten Zwart Kopjes, and Taute took post between Helvetia and Machadodorp. Myburg went astray, but at 3.30 A.M. on December 29, in pitch darkness, Müller and W. Viljoen surprised and attacked Helvetia. Owing to a very discreditable absence of all watch on Gun Hill, this strong position was stormed and carried at once. Its loss sooner or later would have rendered the whole position untenable; but in the confusion of the surprise, demoralisation seems to have spread with undue rapidity. Major Cotton, who went up to direct the defence of Middle Hill, was there severely wounded in the head and shoulder, and while in no condition to take responsibility was permitted to sanction a surrender, after 40 men had been killed and wounded. Major Wilkinson, however, on King's Kopje, maintained his position and escaped capture. Viljoen burnt the contents of the camp, and in spite of shell-fire from Zwart Kopjes, succeeded in removing the big gun and the prisoners. Helvetia was reoccupied by troops from Machadodorp, and W. Kitchener, with a small column, hastened down from Lydenburg, but as neither Machadodorp nor Belfast could send any assistance, the chase had to be abandoned.

Botha's grand scheme of attack for Jan. 7, 1901.

Encouraged by this success, Botha formed a grand scheme of attack on the garrisons of the Delagoa Railway. At a council of war held at Hoedspruit, near Middelburg, the details of the plan were disclosed to Viljoen. At midnight on January 7, the stations on the line from Pan to Machadodorp, forty miles apart, were to be attacked simultaneously. Belfast, the strongest place on the threatened section, Pan, Wonderfontein, Nooitgedacht, Dalmanutha and Machadodorp, were all to be assaulted by the combined forces of Viljoen and Botha, the former acting from the north, the latter from the south. To this programme Botha added an assault of his own on Wildfontein.

Smith-Dorrien's position at Belfast.

When the commandos moved to their appointed stations on the night of the 7th, a thick driving mist gave them the desired opportunity for surprise. It was against Belfast that the most serious effort was made. Here General Smith-Dorrien, with 1,300 infantry, 280 of the 5th Lancers and 130 M.I.,

Map, p. 126.

held a perimeter of no less than fifteen miles. The circle of defence was divided, roughly, into two sections. South of the main railway line stood the 1st Gordon Highlanders; north of it the Shropshire L.I., the Royal Irish Regt. and the M.I. In this northern semi-circle, which was the object of Viljoen's attack, the most important post was Monument Hill, three miles north-east of the town. The hill, where there was a strong fort fenced with barbed wire, was held by Captain Fosbery and 83 men of the Royal Irish Regt. Second in importance was the Colliery Hill, two miles west of the town and connected with it by a small branch line.

Plans of Botha and Viljoen.

As at Helvetia, Müller was given the hardest task. With the Johannesburg and Boksburg commandos, he was to assault Monument Hill, while Wolmarans and the Staats Artillerie (reorganised as a mounted corps) tackled the Colliery. Between these two points, Viljoen, with a reserve of Police, held himself ready to make a direct attack on the town as soon as the posts fell. South of the main railway line, Chris Botha, with the Ermelo and Carolina commandos, under the eye of the Commandant-General, was to endeavour to rush the pickets of the Gordon Highlanders.

The attack on Belfast, Jan. 7.

Punctually at midnight Viljoen's detachments delivered their attack; Botha's somewhat later. Müller's men effected a complete surprise, overpowered the sentries at Monument Hill and stumbling through the wire fencing, threw themselves upon the fort. Some were caught in the wire, many were shot down, but the greater number reached the walls and began to climb over them, firing down upon the defenders. Heavily outnumbered, Fosbery and his men fought desperately to the bitter end, some men laying about them with the butt ends of their rifles and others using their fists or wrestling with the enemy. In this brief but bloody struggle Fosbery fell dead and 39 of his men were killed or wounded. One of the Maxim detachment, Private J. Barry, when all his comrades were down, seized a pick and began to smash up the breech of the gun. Called on to stop, he persisted until he had rendered the gun useless, when the Boers, robbed of their spoil, shot him dead. The small post at the Colliery, held by Lieutenant Marshall with twelve men of the Shrop-

shires and seven of the M.I., offered an equally strenuous resistance. Here also there were strong defences, but too large for the little garrison. For an hour, however, they held out, causing the assailants a loss of eighteen men; and it was only when Marshall and nine of his men had been shot down that the Boers were able to enter the works. Chris Botha's southern attack upon the Gordon Highlanders was less successful. At 1 A.M. the south-eastern picket of eleven men was captured, and some pressure was brought to bear from that quarter on the railway station, but the other posts held firm. The south-western picket under Lieutenant McLaren, 2nd Lieutenant Sworder and 30 men of "F" Company, bore the brunt of the attack and made a particularly fine defence of their trenches and sangars against a strong body of Boers. Nevertheless, the night's issue still hung in the balance. In reinforcing his pickets and in forming an inner line of defence round the railway station, Smith-Dorrien had exhausted nearly the whole of his reserves, and the entire circle of defence was warmly engaged. With the Monument and Colliery in his hands, it rested with Viljoen to deliver the finishing blow; but the very factors which hitherto had helped him—fog and the great extent of the perimeter—now reacted against him. Approaching the town from the north he found every point of vantage held; in the darkness and mist his men lost cohesion and fired upon one another, and he was unable to ascertain how Botha's attack had succeeded. Concluding finally that the co-operation had altogether failed and dreading artillery fire when daylight should come, he called off the whole of his men before dawn.

The simultaneous attacks on other stations, Jan. 7.

The attacks upon the six other garrisons were carried out with extraordinary punctuality but were not all pressed with equal vigour and met with an even smaller measure of success. Saving Machadodorp, all the threatened stations were garrisoned by detachments of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, and all were defended with much resolution. Pan, under Major Williams, Wonderfontein under Lieut.-Colonel Burney, and Nooitgedacht under Captain Southey, were attacked precisely at midnight by the commandos of Middelburg and Germiston under Commandant Trichardt

and by Botha's burghers from the south. Although in every case fog permitted the enemy to get within close range of the defences and to inflict a certain amount of loss on detached posts, by 1.30 A.M. all these assaults had flickered out. Wildfontein, under Captain A. S. Turner, did equally well. Further to the east Dalmanutha, under Major Rhodes, repelled the attacks of some Lydenburgers, while other burghers of the same commando, together with a detachment from Carolina, withdrew baffled from before Machadodorp. At this place, Rocky Hill, held by Lieutenant Harris and 93 men of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, was the object of a vehement assault in which Harris was killed and nine men were wounded. Other efforts against Naval Hill and Signal Hill came to nothing.

Outcome of the night.

Such was the history of this eventful night. The British garrisons, with a total loss of 24 killed, 78 wounded and 70 prisoners, had everywhere held their own, and Botha's big scheme had signally failed, as, indeed it thoroughly deserved to fail. With all the advantages of the initiative, with no mobile columns in the field to interfere with his movements, with a great preponderance of force over any single garrison, the Commandant-General threw all these advantages to the winds, and instead of concentrating against Belfast or any other garrison that he might desire to reduce, disseminated his large force in a series of isolated attacks. Nevertheless, both attack and defence were honourable to the combatants. The manner in which the numerous Boer columns converged in darkness and fog upon seven different points and delivered all their attacks within a few minutes of midnight, was highly creditable to the Boer leading, while the hardihood shown in the storming of Monument Hill and at one or two other points would have done honour to any army in the world. No less excellent was the behaviour of the small and scattered British posts, manned by the fine regiments, English, Scottish and Irish, whose good fortune it was to share in the defence.

Summary of the situation in the Transvaal, close of Jan. 1901.

Taken as a whole, however, the events in the Transvaal described in the course of this chapter were far from satisfactory to the British arms. In almost every action the Boers had been the aggressors. After fifteen months of

war, this fact alone was an ominous sign for the future. The disaster to the convoy at Buffelspoort, the defeat at Nooitgedacht, the capture of Modderfontein and Helvetia, the narrow escape of Belfast, the impotence of the columns in all attempts to retaliate after these and other incidents, and the ease with which commandos had concentrated, manœuvred and dispersed; all this was calculated to dispel the last hope of a speedy pacification.

Kitchener decides to concentrate against Botha and the east.

It was now Kitchener's turn to reply. But in which direction was he to strike? The west was still menacing; the far north was as yet unpenetrated, and the north-east was the playground of Viljoen's bands. But the east presented elements of peculiar danger. Among the tough commandos of this region Botha's influence, now as always, was strong. He had already proved his ability to unite large numbers of them for a special effort; Beyers had just entered the eastern district; Viljoen might at any moment cross the railway to co-operate. Towards the end of January, with a keen insight into the whole situation, Kitchener resolved, while throwing small additional columns into the western area, to concentrate an overwhelming force for the conquest of the Eastern Transvaal. French was to be in command and wholly new methods were to be applied.

The great scheme concerted between the Transvaal and the Free State, Jan. 1901.

A vague, but in reality a well-founded rumour as to the intentions of the enemy strengthened this resolve. Though grand strategy was not the *forte* of the Boer leaders, they were fond of adumbrating ambitious schemes for concerted action. One such plan, grandiose but shadowy, had for some time past been occupying their minds. Judge Hertzog, who, it will be remembered, had invaded Cape Colony in mid-December, was to march west to Lambert's Bay and there meet a vessel bearing munitions of war and mercenaries from Europe. Kritzinger, his co-invader, was to foment rebellion in the midlands. When all was ready, Christiaan de Wet was to invade the Colony in force, join Hertzog at De Aar and march on Cape Town, while Botha, with 5,000 men from the Eastern Transvaal, invaded Natal and marched on Durban. How far this plan was realised, and what was its ultimate fate, will be described in the next two chapters.

HELVETIA

(Captured Dec. 29. 1900)

Scale of Yards

300 150 0 300 600 900 1200 1500 Yards

From Dullstroom

To Zwart Kopjes

Wire (low)

Ex.Gd (Night)

Deep Trench

Helvetia Farm

Kraal fortified

Wire (high)

Deep Cover

Trenches

Wire (high)

Wire (low)

Ex.Gd (Night)

Night

Loopholed Wall

R.A.M.C.

Night

KING'S KOPJE

17 Guns

SOUTH HILL

O.C.

H.Q. Camp

Water

Night

Water

MIDDLE HILL

7 Guns

Ex Gd (Night)

To Waterval Onder 8 miles.

GUN HILL

100 Men

Lyddite

47 (4") Guns

Water

From Machadodorp 7 miles.

ATTACK ON BELFAST

Midnight Jan. 7. 1901.

SCALE OF MILES

¼ ½ ¾ 1 2

To Dullstroom

Royal Irish Regt (Fosbergs post)

Monument Hill (100 Ft above station)

Drift

Pickets

Royal Irish Regt Pickets

Shropshire Pickets

BELFAST

Colliery

Marksmans Post

Royal Irish Regt Camp

Headquarters

5th Lancers Camp

Branch line to Colliery

R.A.S.C. Station

Artillery Camp

Gordons Camp

Bay Rly

Pretoria-Delagoa Bay Rly

Pickets

S.E. Picket (Overbower Farm)

Gordon Highlanders

M. Gordons Post (S.W. Picket)

CHAPTER V

THE INVASION OF CAPE COLONY AND THE GREAT DE WET HUNT

(December, 1900–March, 1901)

I

The Invasion of Hertzog and Kritzinger

HERTZOG and Kritzinger, the forerunners of de Wet, had carried out the preliminaries of the great plan of campaign with no small success.* Hertzog, after his hurried interview with de Wet during the fighting at Sliks pruit on December 3, made his way to the south-west, gathered from the commandos of that district a well-equipped following of 1,000 horsemen, and crossing the Orange on December 16, at Zand Drift, thirty miles north of Colesberg, headed straight for the south. On the same day, 85 miles away to the eastward, Kritzinger, with 700 Free Staters and rebels, crossed the river near Odendaal Drift and moved south upon Burghersdorp. To pursue these bands and to control the disaffection in Cape Colony, which it was their mission to foment, became matters of urgent importance. Major-General Settle had come into Bloemfontein on December 6 and had been directed by Kitchener to hand over his command to Sir C. Parsons and proceed to Cape Colony to report upon the situation. After a rapid, but careful inquiry, he was forced to inform Kitchener that disaffection was pronounced, and to recommend that martial law should be proclaimed at the earliest possible date. The advice was followed; and towards the end of December fourteen districts of Cape Colony were placed under martial

Hertzog and Kritzinger cross the border, Dec. 16, 1900.

General map, Cape Colony.

Kitchener's first steps.

* See chap. i, pp. 35, 38, 42.

law.* The step came none too soon. Arrangements for the pursuit of the raiders were also set on foot with vigour. Kitchener ordered into the line the columns of Thorneycroft, Byng, W. H. Williams, Sir C. Parsons and De Lisle, and transferred them rapidly by rail to Naauwpoort Junction. He also drew down from the Transvaal the 7th Dragoon Guards under Lieut.-Colonel Lowe, the 2nd Coldstreamers, and the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse, while the two battalions of Guards, now standing on the Orange River under Colonel Inigo Jones, were hastily formed into two mobile columns and placed under the command of two active Guardsmen, Lieut.-Colonels Henniker and Crabbe. The local forces rapidly assembling at various points in Cape Colony were despatched in every direction to protect the railways and principal towns. The sleepy life of Cape Colony was galvanised into sudden activity; columns sprang up on all sides, and the raiders were scarcely across the Orange before troops hastened after them in hot pursuit. Settle was ordered to take command on the line of communications between De Aar and Naauwpoort, and to organise all available troops to prevent the passage of this railway. By December 20 he had at Hanover Road the columns of De Lisle† and Bethune,‡ each about 800 strong and exclusively composed of mounted men, while Henniker§ was at De Aar.

Hertzog marches to Britstown, Dec. 16–22.

Hertzog, who had occupied Philipstown on December 19, now threw out his feelers to reconnoitre the most favourable direction for an advance. Forced, by the presence of Settle's columns at Hanover Road, to abandon his intention of a

* Britstown, Victoria West, Hanover, Middelburg, Graaff Reinet, Richmond, Murraysburg, Aberdeen, Steynsburg, Cradock, Tarka, Molteno, Beaufort West and Carnarvon. It was not until the middle of January, 1901, that the remaining districts, save only the Transkei, Tembuland, Griqualand East, Pondoland and the Cape Colony Ports, incurred a similar measure of severity.

† De Lisle:—N.S. Wales M.R.; West Aust. M.I.; 6th M.I.; Loch's Horse; two guns "R" Battery; two pom-poms.

‡ Bethune:—1st Brabant's Horse; two guns 85th Battery, and, later, part of De Lisle's force above, transferred.

§ Henniker:—Four cos. I.Y.; two Elswick guns; 315 men 1st and 2nd Coldstream Guards. (350 Victorian Imp. Bushmen were substituted later for the I.Y., and two guns "M" Battery for Elswick guns.)

direct march to the south, he moved rapidly west, engaged an armoured train at Houtkraal (De Aar–Orange River line) and passed some of his men across the line at this point. Others effected a passage south of De Aar, and both forces made their point upon Britstown, snapping up on their way four Yeomanry companies which had been sent against them very incautiously by the senior officer at De Aar. Thorneycroft, who arrived at this moment from the north, and De Lisle were hurried out in pursuit, and were followed by Colonel Parke, who, with the 17th and 18th Yeomanry, had been sent down from Kimberley.

Kritzinger throws himself into the midlands, Dec.–Jan.

In the meantime Kritzinger had thrown himself into the Zuurberg, and General MacDonald had come down to Burghersdorp to superintend the pursuit. In this case also troops were ready to head the raiders, for, on December 21, the columns of Williams, Lowe and Byng, under Colonel Garstin, and an independent column under Grenfell, were disposed on an arc from Sherborne to Steynsburg, favourably placed, that is, to intercept Kritzinger's further progress to the south. On the 24th Kitchener came down to Naauwpoort and ordered Garstin to swing to his right and move on Burghersdorp. Kritzinger, however, gave these columns the slip, and, having crossed the railway at Sherborne, capturing a train and some colonial troops on his passage, dashed away southward towards Zuurpoort. Kitchener now called up Douglas Haig, French's able staff officer, and gave him command of the four columns of Byng, Williams, Grenfell and Lowe, with orders to pursue with energy. The chase continued, with frequent skirmishes but no decisive action, from Zuurpoort to Murraysburg, and thence by Aberdeen to Willowmore, and early in February, having admirably effected his purpose of making a diversion into the very heart of Cape Colony, Kritzinger began to fall back. Like Hertzog, however, he had attracted few recruits, and had been dogged persistently by Haig's columns for seven weeks. The failure of the British columns to bring these raiders to close action was no matter for surprise. When nearly every Dutchman was a channel for intelligence and every farmstead a base of supply; when fires lighted on

the hills gave warning of every British movement, the conditions were too unequal to allow the pursuers to effect a surprise; while the absence of all proper military control of the railways in the Colony also proved a great hindrance.

Settle pursues Hertzog, end of Dec.

When Kitchener was at Naauwpoort he had rearranged the commands in Cape Colony, placing the western, midland and eastern lines respectively under Settle, Inigo Jones and MacDonald. Under this arrangement Settle proceeded to De Aar and assumed direction of the three columns now at Britstown under De Lisle, Thorneycroft and Parke, while there also came under him Parsons's column, sent by rail to Victoria Road, and Henniker's troops standing at Houtkraal. With these forces Settle began to pursue the six commandos under Hertzog, Brand, Conroy, Pretorius, Theunissen and Nieuwhoudt, which made up Hertzog's following.

Hertzog baffled in the far west, Jan.–Feb. 1901.

Hertzog's object, we may remind the reader, was to get to Lambert's Bay, where he expected to find a vessel from Europe bearing men and munitions of war, and then to plunge into the rich districts which lie about Cape Town. On December 29, having thrown off De Lisle and Parsons in succession, he rode west to Carnarvon and Williston. A stern chase in a region so remote from the railway was evidently hopeless. On January 1, therefore, Settle moved his headquarters to Beaufort West, brought in his columns to the railway and transferred them rapidly to the south with a view of blocking the passes over the formidable mountain-ranges which lay across Hertzog's path. Henniker and Bethune were sent to Matjesfontein, and thence to the Roggeveld passes, while De Lisle took train for Piquetberg Road. Troops and local levies were hurried to the front and occupied all the important points of the Worcester, Ceres and Piquetberg districts. Descending upon Fraserburg and then upon Sutherland, and finding the Roggeveld passes held, Hertzog swerved north-west towards Calvinia, whence a road turns the mountain barrier and leads to Lambert's Bay. Riding hard, some parties of the enemy reached the sea, and, standing on the bluffs, scanned the horizon for the phantom vessel which was to bring fresh hope and fresh enthusiasts to the falling cause. A vessel indeed there was, but it flew

General Kritzinger.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

General J. B. M. Hertzog.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

the white ensign * and saluted the raiders with a volley of shell as a reminder that they had reached the element where Britain, under Providence, was undisputed mistress. Turning their horses' heads, the saddened burghers fell slowly back. Settle threw out against them a new corps of irregulars, named Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, under the famous hunter Johannes Colenbrander; De Lisle and Scobell, who had replaced Bethune, joined in the chase; and, thanks to the thorough watch on the Piquetberg passes, Hertzog was forced back to the north-east. In the middle of February his forces were about Carnarvon and Fraserburg.

II

De Wet's Invasion

When sufficient time had elapsed for the raids of Hertzog and Kritzinger to exercise their full influence upon the conduct of the British defence, and at the moment when they had drawn the pursuing columns far away to the south, Christiaan de Wet once more took the field. In the middle of December, after the hunt described in Chapter I. he had dispersed his commandos, and they for their part had successfully dodged the columns of Charles Knox, until January 5, when the withdrawal of White and Barker to Kroonstad practically ended the pursuit. At the eleventh hour the operations had been marred by a very untoward event. At Kromspruit, 16 miles from Lindley, Colonel White sent out the Commander-in-Chief's Bodyguard, 154 strong, under Colonel Laing, for the purpose of signalling to Reitz. The party was ambushed by Philip Botha. Laing and 12 men were killed, 33 wounded, and the rest taken prisoners.

De Wet in December 1900.

Map, p. 156.

Action of Kromspruit, Jan. 4.

It was a few days after this occurrence that de Wet, who was at Philip Botha's camp near Lindley, received from the hands of his despatch-riders reports of the most optimistic character from Kritzinger and Hertzog. These reports decided his action. Knowing the great dislike of his

De Wet plans his invasion, mid-January.

* H.M.S. *Sybille*, wrecked shortly afterwards at this spot.

followers for a campaign in Cape Colony, he made a virtue of necessity, and ordered that a part of each commando should stay behind to fight in its own district, and that the remainder should assemble on January 25 at that favourite rendezvous, the Doornberg. Up to that date the burghers chosen were granted leave to proceed to their homes. But the secret, confided to too many people, in due course leaked out. When Kitchener received the news he ordered a combined movement on the Doornberg by two groups of columns, under Generals Bruce Hamilton and Charles Knox. The latter officer, who had retained the columns of Pilcher and Crewe, was now at Leeuwkop, 22 miles south-east of Winburg. Hamilton, with a recently-formed group of three columns under Colonels White, Maxwell and Monro, was hastily summoned to Kroonstad from a false scent in the west.*

Kitchener gets wind of it.

To the Boer rendezvous there came nearly all the best of the Free State leaders. Steyn and de Wet were present, together with Generals Piet Fourie and Froneman; Commandants M. Prinsloo (Bethlehem), Haasbroek (Winburg), De Vos (Kroonstad), Van der Merwe (Parys), Ross (Frankfort), Wessel Wessels (Harrismith), Kolbe (Bloemfontein), and Jan Theron; with 2,200 men, one gun, and a pom-pom. The first business was formal. Steyn, whose term of office had expired, was elected and sworn in as Vice-State-President until such time as a regular election could be held in proper form, and the

The Boers meet at the Doornberg, Jan. 25.

* Major-General Bruce Hamilton's force, reconstructed at Kroonstad on January 14, was now as follows:—

(*a*) Maxwell's column: Rimington's Guides, four guns 39th Battery, two pom-poms, two sq. 9th Lancers, one co. Royal Irish Rifles and 344 Cape Mounted Rifles with three 15-pdrs.; 627 all ranks.

(*b*) Monro's column: Bethune's M.I. (318), two guns 39th Battery, 400 Sussex Regt., one pom-pom; 766 all ranks.

(*c*) White's column (incorporating part of Barker's column broken up January 13): four guns, 43rd and 76th Batteries, two pom-poms, 260 I.Y., two sq. 16th Lancers, and three cos. R.I. Rifles; 839 all ranks.

Total 2,332, including 1,400 mounted men.

Major-General C. Knox's force:—

(*d*) Pilcher's column: four guns "U" Battery, two guns 86th Battery, one pom-pom; 5th, 7th, and Burma M.I., 6th Batt. I.Y., one co. 3rd Gren. Gds.; 1,276 all ranks.

(*e*) Crewe's column: three guns 17th Battery, one pom-pom, Kaffrarian Rifles, Q.R. Volunteers, and Border Horse; 721 all ranks.

Executive Council was also nominated.* On the afternoon of the 27th, all being ready, de Wet started south for his second raid on Cape Colony, and on the same night crossed the Smaldeel-Winburg branch railway. He was sighted by both groups of British columns; from the north by Bruce Hamilton, who had detrained at Ventersburg Road, and reached Ventersburg at noon, and from the south by Knox at Leeuwkop. It was just too late for effective co-operation. Knox was under orders to wait for Hamilton, and Hamilton was delayed by heavy storms of rain, so that de Wet got a fair start and moved leisurely southward, camping on the night of the 28th on the Tabaksberg.

De Wet marches south, Jan 27.

The moment that he realised this first failure, Kitchener changed his plans and endeavoured to use his old device of forestalling de Wet by means of the railway. Bruce Hamilton's force was shipped into trains at Smaldeel and sent south to Bloemfontein, while Knox assumed the difficult duty of pursuing de Wet unaided. With Pilcher's column alone, for Crewe was moving wide on the flank, he attacked de Wet at the Tabaksberg on the morning of the 29th and engaged him with the utmost boldness all day, while the heavy Boer convoy wound its way to the south. Well-placed and numerous, the Boers held their ground till the evening, and at night struck back with some effect at Crewe, capturing a pom-pom. Knox had 43 casualties and the Boers about the same. There now lay before de Wet the barrier which his experience of two months earlier had led him to treat with some contempt, the Thaba 'Nchu-Ladybrand chain of posts. It was here that Bruce Hamilton had been intended to forestall him, but a block of traffic on the railway had made that General's journey scarcely quicker by rail than it would have been by road. His last troops arrived at Sannah's Post on the night of the 30th, and on that night de Wet, outmarching Knox, who camped only at Fairfield, crossed the cordon at Israel's Poort and headed towards Dewetsdorp.

Action of Tabaksberg, Jan. 28

* Consisting of Steyn as chairman; Brain and Brebner, Secretaries of State; A. P. Cronje, Jan Meyer, and C. de Wet; R. de Villiers was secretary to the War Council, and Gordon Fraser private secretary to Steyn.

Kitchener makes strenuous and comprehensive efforts to head De Wet on the Orange, Jan. 30–Feb. 7

This second chance missed, Kitchener repeated the same strategy with more logical thoroughness. The line of the Orange was the next barrier at which de Wet might be intercepted, and hither both Knox and Hamilton, entraining at Bloemfontein and detraining at Bethulie, were hurried round by rail. But this was only the first of a whole series of precautionary measures. The meaning of the raids of Hertzog and Kritzinger was now apparent. The columns of Haig and Settle, decoyed far to the south, could not be spared for other work. De Wet's junction with the raiding bands must at all costs be thwarted, and to thwart it troops had to be snatched from all quarters of the field of war, hastily formed into columns and directed upon the Orange River. In a sudden improvisation of this character Kitchener excelled. No commander was ever less hampered by the conventions which usually fetter action at such critical moments. The troops of Paget and Plumer, on the point of taking part in French's great movement in the Eastern Transvaal, which had actually begun on January 28, were railed down to Naauwpoort. From the same distant region the Essex Regiment, then at Wonderfontein, was transferred to Norval's Pont, and the Royal Fusiliers, then at Brugspruit, to Rosmead Junction. The columns of Hughes-Hallett * and Herbert, which had been engaged in clearing the Smithfield and Rouxville districts, were called to the south bank of the Orange, and MacDonald was directed to bring in the garrisons of Smithfield, Rouxville and Wepener. Dewetsdorp had never been reoccupied, so that the whole of the southern districts of the Free State, save on the actual railway, were denuded of British troops. Two regiments of cavalry, just arrived from England, and a regiment of irregulars, the Prince of Wales's Light Horse, newly raised at Cape Town, were concentrated at Naauwpoort, and formed into a column under Bethune. † At the same point 1,000 mounted infantry, also not long from England,

* Hallett's column:—Lovat's Scouts, 3rd S. Lancashire M.I.; three guns 82nd Batt. R.F.A.; 2nd Seaforth Highlanders; total, 796.

† Bethune's column:—1st (King's) Dragoon Guards, 3rd Dragoon Guards, Prince of Wales's Light Horse, and "G" Batt. R.H.A.

and still somewhat imperfectly trained, were placed under the command of Colonel Hickman.* From Kimberley a small column under Major Paris† came down to Orange River Bridge. Finally, Lieutenant-General Lyttelton was transferred to Naauwpoort from his command in the Eastern Transvaal, and directed to take control of the whole of the operations against de Wet.

A question of command.

To leave French in the Eastern Transvaal and to transfer Lyttelton to Cape Colony was a step of doubtful wisdom. Lyttelton had held the Delagoa Railway for four months, but was wholly new to Cape Colony, where French, on the other hand, was thoroughly at home. It was there, indeed, that he had first displayed his fitness for high command. Moreover, of the two great campaigns which were now beginning, that in the south promised to be a hot pursuit by mounted troops, whom French was most competent to control; that in the north, as we shall see hereafter, was designed to be of a diametrically opposite character.

The watch on the Orange.

By the end of the first week in February, thanks to the railways and Kitchener's fierce energy, Lyttelton had twelve columns favourably placed to meet de Wet. Paget, Plumer, Hickman and Bethune, were at Naauwpoort, centrally posted for any emergency. On the line of the Orange, Hamilton and Knox, with five columns, were at or near Bethulie, while Hallett and Herbert were watching the drifts on either side of Aliwal and scouting well to the north. But if the watch on the eastern section of the river line was adequate, the same could hardly be said for the section from Norval's Pont westward. Here the only column was that of Paris, and Paris had been sent to Zoutpan's Drift, far up in the west, where there was no means of crossing and where his presence was useless. None of the columns assembling at Naauwpoort was sent forward to the river. The south bank, therefore, was held only by a flimsy chain of observation posts. As in the case of the eastern section, arrangements

* Hickman's column:—1,000 M.I., four guns 17th and 43rd Batteries, two pom-poms.

† Paris's column:—Dennison's Scouts, Hampshire Yeomanry, one sq. 5th New Zealanders, two guns 37th Battery, two pom-poms, two cos. Kimberley Regt.; total, 620.

had been made for placing mines at the principal drifts, but before the work could be completed, an irruption of Boers surprised and scattered the working parties.

De Wet's manœuvres for crossing the Orange, Jan. 30, Feb. 9.

Suddenly freed from all direct pursuit, de Wet, after his passage of the Thaba 'Nchu line on January 30, had continued his march to the south with the utmost deliberation. His scouts, riding far and wide, soon reported that the line of the Orange from Norval's Pont eastward was closely guarded. Against this section, therefore, he made an elaborate feint, leaving Fourie and a small force to divert attention thither and spreading a report that he intended to take Odendal Stroom by storm and force a passage near that point. He himself set out for the west, crossed the railway between Springfontein and Jagersfontein Road on the nights of February 7 and 8, and marched to Philippolis. Froneman, who had been sent on in advance, captured and looted a goods train at Pompi Siding on the night of February 5. By an ironical stroke of fortune, this train was carrying Bruce Hamilton's baggage. The contents, a quantity of ammunition, saddlery, blankets, sugar and flour, proved a most welcome addition to the Boer ordnance and commissariat. De Wet now made up his mind to cross the Orange at Sand Drift, and on the 9th, having ordered Fourie to follow him, he marched towards that point.

He mystifies his enemies and crosses the Orange, pursued by Hamilton and Knox who fall out of the hunt, Feb. 9–14.

Though the false rumours spread by de Wet had received scant credence, he had succeeded none the less in completely mystifying his enemies. On this very day, the 9th, Bruce Hamilton was making a reconnaissance to the north from Slikspruit, and it was only in the evening that Kitchener received definite news of de Wet's march on Sand Drift. In the vain hope of catching or forestalling him, Hamilton and Knox were ordered to march in pursuit by the north bank, while Lyttelton was to throw out troops from Naauwpoort. But these orders were belated. When the two former generals, having covered seventy miles by forced marches, reached the Drift at 7 A.M. on the 12th, they were fifteen hours behind the last of Fourie's rear-guard. De Wet had crossed on the 10th. An accident of the weather made the error by which troops were detached to the north bank

doubly unfortunate. Between the 10th and the 12th a heavy flood had come down, and the swirling current and holding sands caused so much delay that it was not until the 14th that all the troops and baggage were across, and by that time the two groups of pursuing columns were out of the hunt for the time being. Knox reached Houtkraal late on the 15th; Hamilton De Aar on the 16th.

De Wet's prospects and first move.

Although de Wet had reached the soil of Cape Colony, and had thus won his third strategical success, his enterprise was already beginning to wear a very doubtful complexion. His horses and draught animals had suffered from soaking rain and heavy roads, and his little army of 2,200 men had undergone a serious diminution, for Prinsloo, van Tonder, de Vos and about 800 burghers had refused to leave the Free State. Columns he knew were behind him, and there were rumours of columns to the south. Like Hertzog, therefore, he took what appeared to him to be the line of least resistance, and headed west towards Philipstown. Halfway to this place he had his first skirmishes with Lyttelton's troops.

Plumer attacks de Wet from the south, Feb. 9–14.

Lyttelton had been unable to respond to Kitchener's urgent message of the 9th ordering him to check de Wet at Sand Drift. The last of the troops so hastily assembled at Naauwpoort were not in till the 11th, and though Plumer's fine Australasian force, divided into two corps under Lt.-Cols. Jeffreys and Cradock,* was quite ready for the field, Cradock had been detached to Sherborne and was recalled only on the evening of the 9th. Jeffreys, however, started that evening, and Cradock, with whom went Plumer, early on the 10th. Reaching Colesberg at noon on the 11th and receiving orders to march west, Plumer, proceeding by Zevenfontein and the Sea Cow River, gained contact with de Wet at 11 A.M. on the 12th a little to the north of Hamelfontein. The effect was immediate. Yielding to this new pressure, de Wet aban-

First contact, Feb. 12.

* *Plumer's force*—(*a*) Lieut.-Col. Jeffreys' Corps:—550 mounted men, 4th Queensland Imp. Bushmen and 4th Imp. Bushmen Corps, one sq. Yeomanry, four guns 7th Battery, one pom-pom.

(*b*) Lieut.-Col. Cradock's Corps: 520 mounted men, *i.e.*, a composite regiment of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd contingents New Zealand M.R., 150 West Australians, Victorians, and Tasmanians, and a few 3rd Q.I.B.'s four guns 7th and 85th Batteries, one pom-pom.

doned his march to Philipstown and swerved away to the north-west. Though Jeffreys and Cradock, moving on parallel lines, pressed him hard, de Wet, with a series of those rearguard actions of which he was a past-master, covered the retreat of his convoy and in the evening outspanned at Hondeblafs River. On the 13th, the Boer scent was lost for a time, but Plumer's guides, Brink and McKenzie, quickly picked it up and the chase was resumed in torrents of rain. Two hundred abandoned Boer horses showed that the pace was telling. When the sun rose on the 14th, after a night of drenching rain, de Wet was found to be holding the Wolvekuil kopjes with the evident intention of giving his weary draught beasts time to drag the convoy into safety. At 8.45 A.M. Plumer attacked the position. A party of the King's Dragoon Guards,* which advanced unsupported to a salient hill in the Boer left centre, was surrounded and captured, but Cradock's New Zealanders and Australians, in a very dashing assault in which they lost twenty-three men, turned the Boer right and forced de Wet to continue the retreat. Over a road strewn with derelict carts and trollies, Plumer was hastening in pursuit when a terrific storm broke, bringing the force to a standstill for several hours. At 4 P.M. came a second, which saturated the veld, turned dry channels into rushing torrents, and bogged horses and guns. Patrols, however, pushed on, sighted the Boers making for the De Aar-Kimberley railway and sent a message through to Potfontein Station warning the troops and armoured trains to be ready for an attempt to force the line. This message was received at midnight by Captain Smitheman, the intelligence officer in charge of the operations; but the armoured trains were not at hand and troops were not forthcoming.

Action of Wolvekuil, Feb. 14.

De Wet had determined to cross at Bartmann's Siding, and to that end blew up the line on either side; but the same storms which had checked Plumer had turned the Durans Vlei, just to the east of the railway, into an almost impassable swamp, where, in the darkness, men, animals and wagons fell into indescribable confusion. It was only by extraordinary exertions that the gun and pom-pom were

De Wet crosses the line but loses his convoy; night of Feb. 14.

* Two squadrons, detached from Bethune, were with Plumer.

dragged through; then, leaving Fourie and a hundred men to cover the retreat and extricate what he could, de Wet, fearing to be surprised at daylight, hurried on. In the morning, Nanton's armoured train, supported by Colonel Crabbe's small column, came out from Houtkraal Station and drove off Fourie, who made his retreat to the south and for some time lost touch with de Wet. When Plumer reached the scene the whole of de Wet's convoy, with forty wagons, much ammunition, a Maxim gun, and thirty prisoners, fell into his hands. Spent with fatigue and sodden with rain and mud, de Wet's burghers urged their jaded horses north-west towards Strydenburg, with Crabbe snapping terrier-like at their rear and Plumer struggling on in Crabbe's wake.

Intended junction of Hertzog and de Wet

During the progress of these events in the northern part of Cape Colony, the roamings of Hertzog and Kritzinger had brought these raiders and the columns detached for their pursuit nearer to the scene of critical operations. Kritzinger had harked back to the Zuurberg, and Hertzog, pursued by De Lisle and Scobell, had been driven to the north of Carnarvon, and on the 16th was between that place and Britstown. Scobell on this day was at Fraserburg and De Lisle at Carnarvon. It was now evident that it was the intention of Hertzog and de Wet to join hands, and that, should they fix their point of junction sufficiently far to the west, it was in their power to succeed.

Hertzog on Feb. 16.

Kitchener's great plan, Feb. 16.

On the 16th Kitchener arrived at De Aar, and after conferring with Lyttelton and Settle, issued orders for a methodical plan of campaign. In estimating this plan, it must be borne in mind that Kitchener's main aim was to exclude the Boers from the south-western district of Cape Colony, which, owing to the absence of railways, was a very unfavourable theatre for British operations. His measures, therefore, were taken with the express purpose of thwarting de Wet's march to the south, and of forcing both him and Hertzog away to the north and west. He decided to use the western railway for the concentration at short intervals of a chain of columns, each roughly 1,000 strong. Should de Wet turn south, these columns were to push out to the

west in succession, taking up the pursuit one after another, and constantly opposing fresh troops to the harassed bands of the enemy. At the northern extremity of the chain, Paris was ordered to cover Hopetown. Plumer, with Crabbe and Henniker * placed under him, was to continue the direct stern chase; as the next *échelon* to the left, Knox, controlling Pilcher and Crewe, was to push out from Houtkraal; still further to the left, Bruce Hamilton's threefold force from De Aar and Bethune from Richmond Road were to converge upon Britstown; Paget, with Hickman,† Thorneycroft and the Seaforth Highlanders (railed down from Aliwal North), were to be planted at Victoria Road, and, finally, Haig's columns under Byng, Lowe and Williams were called away from the pursuit of Kritzinger and sent to Murraysburg, whence they also were forwarded to Victoria Road. Colonel Gorringe, with the Colonial Defence Force, and, at a later date, De Lisle and Scobell were detached to deal with Kritzinger.

The strategy of railways.

Thus, from north and south, on a front of 160 miles, there were no less than fifteen columns, divided into seven groups, all, save Paris, facing west, and ready to advance at right angles to de Wet's expected line of advance. Once more the railways had enabled Kitchener to re-establish his grasp upon the strategical situation. Should de Wet outpace his pursuers, Kitchener left instructions that each column in turn should abandon the chase and return to the railway to be conveyed to a destination further south. Plumer was to pursue as far as Carnarvon; Henniker, Hamilton and Knox to Britstown, and other leaders to other points, one and all coming to the line as the scent grew cold, to be "lifted" on by train, as a huntsman "lifts" a pack to a distant view-halloa. All were ordered to conform with each other's

* Henniker, in connection with the foregoing operations, had marched from De Aar to Philipstown on the 13th and reinforced some Victorians who had engaged a detached force of Boers under Olivier for eleven hours on the previous day. Henniker then came on to Houtkraal.

† Between the 13th and 16th Hickman had marched from Hanover Road towards Philipstown and thence to De Aar. His present order to proceed to Victoria West was soon afterwards cancelled. He remained for eight days at De Aar.

movements, and all orders for moves were to be issued by Settle, who, for the purpose of these operations, became Lyttelton's Chief of Staff.

De Wet, pursued by Plumer, circles to the north-west, Feb. 15–19.

If, at this moment, Kitchener had been able to divine the mind of his opponent, he would scarcely have taken the trouble to weave this mighty military net. The raid had lost momentum. De Wet's burghers were thoroughly disheartened, and many were marching on foot. In spite of Hertzog's glowing forecasts, no recruits had joined the flag. Far from seeking to rival Hertzog's march to the south, de Wet, half-unconsciously perhaps, was already beginning to contemplate the abandonment of his designs, and the very excellence of Kitchener's plans proved the salvation of the guerilla leader. For the present, however, he still hoped, by a wide circuit to the north-west, to join Hertzog about Prieska, and it was with this purpose that, on the 15th, he directed his march to Strydenburg. Plumer, who had lost the scent in the course of the 15th, regained it again in the evening, and early on the 16th started off on the spoor. Knox, from Houtkraal, followed twelve hours later; but for practical purposes, in spite of all the elaborate preparations taking place in the south, Plumer, strengthened by Crabbe and Henniker, continued for some little time to bear the whole brunt of the pursuit. The Boers were sighted at Vlugpan, but it was not till 9 A.M. on the 17th, near Gous Pan, that Plumer surprised de Wet's rearguard under Haasbroek, scattering it in confusion and hunting it north to Geluks Poort. Here Plumer established a post, sent his wagons, under escort of Henniker's infantry, to refill at Hopetown, linked up that place with Geluks Poort by means of a field cable, which proved exceedingly useful, and on the 18th and 19th marched on, over a barren and waterless region, to Zoutpansfontein. De Wet was reported ahead making straight for Prieska, but Plumer, after untiring efforts for nine successive days, had now marched himself to a standstill. With no oats for his horses and no biscuits for his men he found himself forced to fall back for supplies. Even now, however, he made a last effort with a handful of his men to retain touch with de Wet, and this effort, as

Plumer is marched to a standstill, and Knox takes up the pursuit, Feb. 19.

we shall see a little later, had most important results. In the meantime, he left it to Knox to take up the pursuit.

De Wet stopped by the swollen Brak, Feb. 19.

On the evening of the 18th de Wet had laagered at Vrouw Pan, fifteen miles ahead of Plumer. During the last three days he had gained something in mobility. Owing to the negligence of the authorities in the Hopetown district, numbers of horses had been left on the veld, so that mounts were gained at every farm for some of the weary *voet-gangers*. Nevertheless, several hundred of these unfortunates still clogged the progress of the column, a particularly unfortunate circumstance, for de Wet was now entering on a period of grave embarrassment and desperately hard marching. His track, the reader will notice, was leading him towards the angle formed by two rivers, the Orange and the Brak, and to gain the Prieska district and join Hertzog he must cross the Brak. But on the 19th, when he reached the banks of this river, he found it a roaring flood and realised that he was in precisely the same quandary as that of December last, when he was penned between two swollen streams, the Orange and the Caledon. Already, so it appeared to him, the pursuing columns were on his heels, for a long line of mounted men was reported by the scouts to be only a few miles behind. In emergencies de Wet rarely hesitated. Disgust with his enterprise and anger with Hertzog for those delusive promises reached a climax. As in December, so now, instantly and finally abandoning his whole scheme of invasion, and only dropping a few men to warn Hertzog of his change of purpose, he doubled to the north-east and searched for a passage across the Orange back to his own country.

He abandons his invasion and turns back, Feb. 19.

Knox follows a false scent, Feb. 19–21.

Unfortunately, this double entirely escaped Knox. At Drinkwater, seven miles south-west of Geluks Poort, Knox had left the direct trail, and taking a short cut due west for Prieska, had on this day, the 19th, reached Springbokpan, twenty miles east of de Wet. On the 20th he struck the Brak at Klip Drift (a few miles above the point de Wet had touched) and found it impassable. De Wet was reported to be downstream, in the angle between the Brak and the Orange, and Hertzog twenty miles up-stream. With the

fixed idea that de Wet would cross the Brak at all costs and join his colleague, Knox was bent on cutting in between them. As it happened, the water fell towards evening, and on the 21st, having managed to pass the whole of his force across the river, Knox struck out on a false trail.

De Wet is tracked by Plumer's scouts from the Brak to the Orange, Feb. 19–21.

The report of British columns at his heels, which had caused de Wet to beat such a hasty retreat from the Brak, was due to a feat of bold and intelligent scouting on the part of 150 Australians and Yeomen under Colonel Vialls, whom Plumer had sent forward in a final effort to keep touch with the Boer force. Moving in three parties of 50 each, without transport and spread out over a wide expanse of country, the little force had appeared to de Wet's scouts like the advance-guard of an army. Once found, the trail was stuck to for two days. De Wet, who had been trying every successive drift in vain, was dogged to Saxen Drift on the 21st, and there attacked with fine audacity by Captain Berry and 50 Queenslanders, who had outstayed all their comrades. On the 22nd, a few men got back to Plumer with their most important information, and two ragged and starving Australians, riding to the Brak on the 21st, passed on word to Knox, who at once retraced his steps, and recrossed that river.

Plumer's dilemma.

But, in a contest with de Wet, scouting even better than this was needed. Knox, who headed east towards Hopetown, was once more out of the hunt, and Plumer, too, lost touch and fell into great perplexity. The circumstances were extraordinarily difficult. Rains far away in the Basuto mountains were governing the strategy of both sides. The reader will see from the map that the Orange between Prieska and Hopetown makes a deep loop to the north. De Wet was circling round this loop looking for passable drifts, and on the night of the 21st laagered at Blaauw Kop, far up to the north. Should the Orange remain in flood he would have to follow the loop south, and head directly towards Plumer, who, on the morning of the 21st, was at Elsjesvlakte. On the other hand, the floods might subside at any moment, and open a passage to the Free State. To pursue to the north, or wait in the south? That, for the moment, was Plumer's

De Wet circles along the Orange, Feb. 21–23.

problem, and it was a problem which nothing but close and constant physical touch with the enemy could enable him to solve. As it was, his intelligence at every step came a little too late. Word being brought on the 21st that de Wet had been seen at Read's Drift, he marched north to Verlaten Dam, and on the 22nd to Welgevonden, whither Crabbe and Henniker had preceded him. But on the same day de Wet, having halted twenty-four hours at Blaauw Kop, was marching east and then south, skirting the river-loop. Having tried Mark's Drift in vain he made for Maco Drift, and there discovered a small boat, in which, by the morning of the 23rd, 300 men had crossed the Orange in small batches. Then came an interruption which compelled him and his main body to remain on the left bank. Plumer, recovering the lost scent, had darted east from Welgevonden, and as he topped the ridges of de Kalk sighted de Wet's rearguard. Spurring their horses at full speed to the south, Plumer's advanced guard of Victorian Imperial Bushmen, under Lieut.-Colonel L. F. Clarke, led the pursuit with energy, but the chance of penning the Boers against the river had now been lost. Ridden to a standstill at Slypsteen, Clarke gave place to fresh troops from Henniker's column—Victorians, Dragoons, and a squadron of I.L.H., the whole under Lieut.-Colonel Owen. The pace was hot, but the Boers kept their lead, all save a small party which guarded the two guns. Of Owen's men, two squadrons of Victorians, headed by Captain Marker of the Coldstream Guards, Henniker's staff officer, outdistanced all the rest. When the Boer guns were sighted the foremost pursuers had dwindled to four, Marker and three Victorian troopers, Green, O'Brien, and Sheehan. The four galloped forward, the Boer escort fled and the guns and their teams were captured. Thus the endurance of Plumer's columns had met with something, at least, of its well-merited reward. Three miles away a cloud of dust proved that de Wet was a little ahead; but it was now near sunset, and Owen, who since the morning had covered forty-four miles, decided that he must halt. De Wet's men, reduced to the last extremities of fatigue, had a welcome respite of a few hours.

Plumer regains touch, Feb. 23.

De Wet loses his guns, Feb. 23.

But another surprise awaited him. From the scouts riding far in advance came back the unpleasant news that a fresh "army" was observed in front. This, in fact, was the Kimberley column under Major Paris, who, on hearing of de Wet's approach, had promptly decided to throw himself across the path, and to block the road between DuToit's Draai and Hopetown, a distance of some ten miles. Since the Kimberley column consisted mainly of infantry, Paris, taking the only course that appeared open to him, strung out his troops in a chain of pickets, each post having a wagon banked up with forage and mealie sacks to serve as a movable blockhouse. On the right flank of this weak and extended line were posted Dennison's scouts, and on the left a squadron of New Zealanders. This strange-looking barrier had greatly disconcerted de Wet's scouts, who rode back to their chief with a very alarming report. Thinking the news serious, de Wet sent away Haasbroek and all the dismounted burghers with orders to conceal themselves among the bushes on the river-bank until the pursuers had passed. He himself took heart of grace, and with all that remained of his weary force up-saddled at midnight and under the mantle of darkness which had so often proved his salvation rode towards the barrier.

Paris blocks his path, night of Feb. 23.

His scouts did their work well, and the British sentries were careless. Through the very homestead of a farm occupied by the New Zealanders, and between it and an infantry picket, de Wet led his band of stalwarts, unobserved and unresisted. Pressing steadily on through the hours of darkness, he crossed the railway eight miles south of Orange River Station, and on the morning of the 24th off-saddled six miles beyond the line. The same morning the Kimberley column awoke from its slumbers, and, ignorant of what had happened, moved west with the laudable intention of pinning the Boers against Plumer, who, with a similar purpose, was marching simultaneously to the east. The result was a lively skirmish between the two friendly forces which lasted for half-an-hour before the error was recognised. Plumer and Knox, exhausted and nearly starving, converged upon Hopetown on the 25th.

De Wet passes the cordon and breaks to the south, Feb. 24, A.M.

Hertzog, Feb. 16–22.

The moment has come to revert to Hertzog, who had evaded pursuit as successfully as de Wet, and was now on the verge of consummating the long-deferred junction. We left him on the 16th between Carnarvon and Britstown, and it was here that he received a letter from de Wet announcing that leader's intention of travelling to the north-west with a view to a junction in the Prieska district. Hertzog now divided his force, sending Brand to Britstown to collect provisions and await events, while he himself travelled north to meet de Wet. It will be remembered that under Kitchener's orders of the 16th Bruce Hamilton from De Aar and Bethune from Richmond Road had been ordered to converge on Britstown. On the 18th, in pursuance of these orders, Hamilton's foremost troops reached Britstown a few hours after Brand had left it, and on the 19th gained touch with the Boer rearguard and pursued it to Houwater. Bethune, however, and the bulk of Hamilton's troops were still a day's march behind, touch was lost and Brand regained a clear lead. On the 20th he reached the Brak, a little above Beer Vlei, and on the further side of the swollen stream saw three Boers gesticulating and shouting. Their voices were drowned by the noise of the waters; but volunteers swam the river and gained communication. The messengers were from de Wet, announcing the collapse of his plans, the fact that he was penned between two flooded rivers, and asking help from Hertzog. Brand sent word to Hertzog and hurried away down stream to rejoin his chief; but on the 21st he got wind of Knox, who, as the reader will recall, had crossed the Brak on that day at Klip Drift. Brand, therefore, doubled to the east and forded the river, which had now fallen somewhat, near Klein Vrach Kuil. Hertzog, who had also heard of Knox's movement, followed suit, and on the 22nd the two leaders reunited at Zwingel's Pan, sixteen miles west of Strydenburg.

Bruce Hamilton's pursuit, Feb. 16.

Hertzog and Brand cross the Brak and unite on Feb. 22.

Hamilton's further pursuit of Hertzog, Feb. 21–24

Just as de Wet's double had escaped the notice of Knox, so that of Hertzog and Brand escaped the notice of Hamilton. Reaching the Beer Vlei on the 21st and there receiving orders from Kitchener (through Settle) to watch the line of the Brak, he dropped Bethune and Monro at Klein Vrach

Kuil, and with Maxwell and White descended the course of the river towards Klip Drift. But at Smidswater, which he reached on the evening of the 22nd, he learnt that Hertzog had broken back, and at once ordered all columns to turn east on the 23rd and hurry in parallel lines towards Strydenburg. Belated as it was, the move was far from hopeless; for although Hamilton was forty miles from the objective Bethune and Monro at Klein Vrach Kuil were only thirty; while Hertzog, engaged as he was in the embarrassing work of groping for de Wet in the midst of hostile columns, had been moving very slowly. It was just possible, too, that de Wet, for whom the day and night of the 23rd were terribly critical, might have got wind of this southern movement, hesitated, and become involved, together with Hertzog, in a network of columns from which there was no escape. But it was not to be. Bethune, on the strength of local intelligence, perfectly well-grounded but twelve hours too late, turned aside at Kalk Kraal, raided Zwingel's Pan with no success, and lost the whole of the 23rd. Hertzog entered and looted Strydenburg on that afternoon, rested there a night, and when Hamilton was sighted approaching the village on the morning of the 24th, made off to the east.* Lyttelton, in a spasmodic effort to intercept him on the railway, ordered Hickman, who had been standing idle for a week at De Aar, to march to Houtkraal, and Thorneycroft, who had been awaiting orders at Victoria West, to go by rail to the north and detrain at Orange River Station. Once more it was just too late. During the night of the 24th, twenty-four hours after de Wet, and some twenty miles south of de Wet's crossing-place, Hertzog and Brand blew up the railway in two places between Potfontein and Paauw Pan Siding, and passed over to the east. Fourie, with the 100 men who had been cut off from de Wet on the 16th, had slipped back to the east unnoticed a couple of days before. On the morning of the 25th, therefore, all three leaders were within

Hertzog crosses the railway, night of Feb. 24.

Fourie has also crossed, Feb. 22.

* Six Boers were found on a kopje, and all killed or captured by a party of Hamilton's scouts under Lieutenant Harvey (Rimington's Guides). Harvey was mortally wounded, and Corporal Clements was severely wounded after shooting three Boers with his revolver. He received the V.C.

the quadrilateral formed by the swollen currents of the Orange and the three sections of railway, Orange River Bridge–De Aar, De Aar–Naauwpoort and Naauwpoort–Norval's Pont.

Lyttelton's great effort to corner the three leaders.

Without a moment's pause, there now began the fifth and penultimate phase of this extraordinary hunt. It lasted for four crowded days, in which Lyttelton made a great effort to bring the enemy to terms. As before, everything hung on the fordability of the Orange, and since another big freshet was reported to be coming down from Basutoland the outlook in this respect was favourable. The direct pursuit of de Wet was to be taken up by Thorneycroft, Henniker and Crabbe, who were railed from Orange River Station to Kraankuil and thence directed on Petrusville. Hickman was launched out from Houtkraal on a course which at first ran parallel with that of Hertzog. To block egress to the east and south, Haig's three columns (under Byng, Williams and Lowe) which, under the obsolete strategy of the 16th, had been retained at Victoria Road, far from the scene of decisive action, took train for Hanover Road and Colesberg; and in order to strengthen Haig in this latter quarter, Plumer too received orders to go by train to Colesberg, a circuit, from Orange River Station, of no less than 225 miles. Against the remote chance of another double to the west, Knox and Paris were to stay at Hopetown and Bruce Hamilton's columns were carried to Paauw Pan and Potfontein. For Bethune no arrangements could yet be made, since it was not till the 27th that he succeeded in reaching Hopetown. Theoretically, therefore, fourteen British columns, with the potent aid of the railways and the still unfordable river, were to form a circle around the scattered Boer bands. There are times, however, and this was one, when railway strategy proves but a poor substitute for mere local mobility.

De Wet continues to skirt the Orange, Feb. 24–26.

De Wet, after four hours' rest on the morning of the 24th, struck the Orange in the afternoon and to his disgust found it as high as ever. Drift after drift—Lombard, Visser's, Glade—were reported by the scouts to be hopeless, and on the evening of the 25th, after some hours rest at Petrusville, Lemoenfontein Drift, from which much had been

expected, proved utterly impracticable. Further and further to the south de Wet was being forced; towards Hertzog, it is true, but also towards he knew not what of massed British columns from Colesberg, Naauwpoort and the other railway bases. He could not retrace his steps, for Thorneycroft's troops, preceding those of Crabbe and Henniker, had left Kraankuil on the evening of the 24th, bound for Petrusville, and were now only twenty miles behind. On the 26th, therefore, he marched south for Sand Drift.

Hertzog, Brand and Hickman, Feb. 25–26.

Here we must pause an instant to collect two important threads. On the 25th Hertzog and Brand, riding east from the railway in two bodies of about 400 apiece, and directing their course upon Petrusville, laagered in the evening at Wolvekuilen. Hickman, riding in a roughly parallel course from Houtkraal, reached Philipstown on the same night, and there received orders from Lyttelton to wheel sharp to the north and join Thorneycroft's group of columns at Petrusville.* He obeyed on the 26th, and at noon, near De Put, where he off-saddled for the midday rest, a Boer force was sighted moving rapidly to the south-east. Hickman followed suit, abandoning his march on Petrusville; but the Boer mobility told, and at Hondeblafs River, where Hickman halted at 4 P.M., the quarry was out of sight. And now the plot began to thicken. A second Boer column was sighted, travelling in the same direction as the first. Hickman rode to intercept it at Karbonatze's Kraal and again failed. Here he bivouacked, and hence, in the last moments of daylight, descried in the distance, a large Boer force moving up the Riet Valley towards Sand Drift. The two columns first seen were those of Brand and Hertzog, who had ridden to Petrusville in the morning, learnt news of de Wet, and followed that leader to the south. The big force seen in the evening was Brand and Hertzog united, and Fourie, who appeared in the nick of time and exactly at the right point. De Wet had not come into view, but he too, it will be remembered, was riding for Sand Drift on that same day, the 26th, and reached it at nightfall. In the small hours of

* Hickman himself had proposed to march direct to Sand Drift. It is interesting to speculate on the course of events had he done this.

Junction of de Wet, Hertzog, Brand and Fourie at Sand Drift, Feb. 27, A.M.

the 27th de Wet, Hertzog, Brand and Fourie all met in the close neighbourhood of Sand Drift. Thus, like particles of quicksilver, all the hunted Boer bands within the quadrilateral had coalesced at the very point at which they had invaded the Colony. But could the river be crossed? De Wet had already answered this question. Two strong young burghers had stripped naked and ridden in. They had reached the Free State shore by swimming and only at extreme peril. The drift was pronounced impassable.

British plan to converge on Sand Drift, Feb. 27.

On the night of the 26th, while the Boer junction was taking place, Thorneycroft camped outside Petrusville, with Henniker and Crabbe close behind. Thorneycroft had heard of de Wet's passage through the town on the previous day, and had actually exchanged shots with Hertzog's rearguard. In the course of the night he gained communication with Hickman at Karbonatze's Kraal, ten miles south-east. All touch had been lost with Lyttelton, so the columns were thrown on their own resources. Hickman, as senior officer, arranged with the others for a combined sweep to the south-east, parallel with the Orange and converging on Sand Drift. An attempt was made to communicate with Colonel Byng, who was known to be coming out from Colesberg, but the messenger was intercepted, and repeated endeavours on the following day to call up the signal-post on Coles Kop also failed, for the good reason that there were no signallers there.

Result of the movement, Feb. 27.

The columns started on the 27th, and in the evening the advanced troops of Hickman, who, from his southerly position at Karbonatze's Kraal had a considerable start, struck the enemy's patrols at Kattegat, five miles south-west of Sand Drift. Since sunrise the united force of Boers, now about 1,500 strong, had been resting in the neighbourhood of the drift while the turbid currents of the Orange rolled mockingly past. At Hickman's approach the burghers upsaddled. Brand was ordered to hold the British in check while the main body trekked south once more through Doornkloof and along the Orange. Brand did his work to perfection. Although Hickman's four field guns were able to shell de Wet with some effect and to hasten his retreat through Doornkloof, and although Colonel Rochfort with

Inset to map, p. 156.

200 M.I. followed the trail till nightfall and engaged Brand at the mouth of the kloof, when darkness fell the last Boer had disappeared to the south. Hickman bivouacked at Kattegat,* Thorneycroft, Henniker and Crabbe a few miles to the north.

De Wet rides on along the Orange, night of Feb. 27.

De Wet rode on. It was eighteen miles to the next drift and he was heading directly for the main line of railway whence, for all he knew, columns might already have issued to bar his path. He had hugged the Orange for eight successive days, incessantly dogged from behind by the British. Would not his enemies at last anticipate him, pin him down if only for a few hours, and give time for the pursuers to come up? Such indeed had been Lyttelton's hope, for by this time the five columns of Plumer and Haig should have been across de Wet's path; but the overtaxed railways had proved unable to convert the strategical balance. Both Haig and Plumer, from points 150 miles apart, had begun entraining on the evening of the 25th, the former at Victoria Road, the latter at Orange River Station. The intention was that Jeffreys and Cradock under Plumer and one of Haig's columns, that of Byng, should detrain at Colesberg and march to the north-west, Plumer watching the country between the Orange and Colesberg and Haig prolonging Plumer's line to the left. Lowe and Williams were to detrain at Hanover Road, march due north, and come into line on Byng's left. What actually happened was as follows. Of Byng's troops only one train-load, 200 men of the S.A. Light Horse, had reached Colesberg by the night of the 26th, and with these men Byng pushed out to the north-west at 7 A.M. on the 27th. The Hanover Road troops were equally late, Williams marching out only at 6 A.M. on the 27th, while Lowe's column had not assembled at the station until twelve hours later. But the most fatal delay was that which befell Plumer. Owing to the deficiency of rolling-stock his first train, carrying part of Jeffreys's Corps, left Orange River Station only at 10.15 P.M. on the 26th, so that Jeffreys had not collected his troops at Colesberg until

The last effort to head de Wet, Feb. 25–27.

* Distance for the day 18–20 miles. He had marched by Venter's Valley, where he picked up his transport.

the night of the 27th. At midnight Cradock's trains were still about De Aar.

Byng's flimsy cordon, night of Feb. 27.

Thus, on this critical night of the 27th, when de Wet was marching south along the Orange, Byng's 200 men were the only obstacle in front of him. Williams, it is true, was on Byng's left, at and about Winkelhoek, but much too far from the Orange to affect the events of the night. Plumer not being present to fill the gap on the right, Byng had to try and watch twenty-five miles of front with his paltry handful of troops. He strung them out in a cordon of small pickets, one of which, that on the extreme right, took post near the junction of the Orange and the Sea Cow River. It numbered 15 men.

De Wet crosses the Orange, Feb. 28, dawn.

Soon after leaving Doornkloof de Wet stumbled on this picket in the darkness, captured seven of the men and put the rest to flight. All night long he rode steadily on and at dawn on the 28th reached Botha's Drift, close to the destroyed Colesberg Bridge. It was the fifteenth ford he had attempted in the last nine days, and it may be imagined with what intense anxiety his burghers awaited the trial. A few men stripped and rode in; soon they were nearly swimming; then they were seen to be going more easily; at last the water barely reached their horses' knees. In a twinkling the river was black with men from bank to bank. Overwrought with the fearful ordeal they had passed through, the burghers vented their relief in shouts of delirious joy and in clamorous vows never to return across that hateful river.

Plumer's pursuit north of the Orange, Feb. 28–March 11.

Later in the same day Hickman, Thorneycroft, Byng and Williams, met at Hamelfontein. Henniker and Crabbe followed the trail through Doornkloof, and 15 Victorians, under Captain Dallimore, by a plucky stroke snapped up a stranded detachment of Brand's rearguard on the banks of the Sea Cow River. Plans were now made for pinning de Wet to the river-line by a joint movement; but a little later the truth was known and the hunt in this quarter abandoned. To the north of the Orange, however, there still remained a faint chance of bringing de Wet to book. Plumer was railed on to Springfontein and directed towards Philippolis, and Bethune, who was at Orange River Bridge on the

28th, was ordered to strike across country by way of Luckhoff and Fauresmith. These measures, like so many others, were just a little behindhand. In any case, there was small hope of success now; for return to his native soil had given de Wet not only an unlimited field for manœuvre, but the power of dispersing his force. At Philippolis, reached on March 1, Hertzog, Brand and Fourie, with all the men of the southern commandos, were dismissed to their various districts, and de Wet and Steyn were left with a few hundred northerners to continue the return march to the starting-point of the raid. The journey was not devoid of excitement. Plumer, arriving at Philippolis on March 3 and finding that de Wet had left it twenty-four hours before, resumed the stern chase which he had broken off a week earlier. On the 4th, at Zuurfontein, he had a brush with Fourie and Brand just before they turned to the east, but de Wet himself on that day was already as far as Fauresmith. Here, at 2 P.M., Bethune's scouts made their appearance, after a forced march from Luckhoff, only to find that de Wet had left three hours before. Over the plains, sodden and heavy with rain, quarry and hunters hastened. Bethune gave up on the 5th, ten miles north of the Riet River, but Plumer and his indomitable Colonials struggled gallantly on. De Wet, with an ever-lengthening lead, rode through Petrusburg, forded the Modder at Abraham's Kraal, and finally, on the night of March 8–9, having swerved sharp to the east, crossed the railway between Brandfort and Smaldeel. On the 11th he reached Senekal and dismissed the last of his burghers. Plumer, who had followed the trail to the point at which de Wet swerved, led his weary troopers into Brandfort on the same day. The hunt was over.

De Wet disperses most of his force, March 1.

Bethune joins in the chase, March 4,

Plumer's final effort single-handed, March 5–11.

End of the hunt, March 11.

Regarded as an operation of war, the "Great de Wet Hunt" may not take rank as a military exploit of the first class; yet as an example of the character of the work which fell to the lot of British columns in the latter period of the war and of the tremendous demands which were made upon the endurance of men and animals, few incidents can be compared with it, whether for dramatic interest or instruction. "De Wet," said a contemporary press telegram, "is

De Wet's mobility and skill.

reported to be demented." What had this demented leader done? Thrice avoiding the embrace of Knox and Hamilton, piercing the Thaba 'Nchu line like paper, filling his bandoliers and supply wagons from the proceeds of an opponent's train, feeling for and finding an unguarded point on the Orange, de Wet had entered the Colony and the door had slammed to behind him. Falling once more into the midst of foes, hotly pursued by a leader almost as brilliant and resourceful as himself, he had broke free with the loss of his convoy and struck to the west with a clear lead of his pursuers. Surprised by the sudden rise of the Brak and imprisoned between two unfordable rivers with eight columns at his heels, he doubled with all the instinct of the hunted fox, and with only the loss inseparable from the rapidity of his movements and the consequent exhaustion of his horses, passed round the first line of pursuing columns and through the second under cover of night. He effected his junction with Hertzog, whose skill and agility had been no less remarkable, in the very midst of a district surrounded on three sides by railways and troops and on the fourth by a swollen river, and as these columns closed on him and all hope of escape appeared lost, he braved the dangerous currents of a broad river, leaving his discomfited enemy agape on the southern bank. Then, throwing off Bethune and Plumer, he regained the district from which he had started forty-three days before. In those days, without reckoning minor tortuosities of route, he had covered at least 800 miles.

Comments on the pursuit.

As an example of mobility and evasion it was a masterpiece indeed. No less remarkable was the pursuit. No one column had marched nearly as far as de Wet, but the majority had covered enormous distances with but slight rests. The dash and devotion of the scouting, the endurance and keenness of officers and men, the collection and distribution of intelligence, the co-operation of columns, and the higher strategy itself, all showed a very marked advance on anything that had gone before; while the tremendous motive force which was now driving the intricate machinery of war made itself felt throughout the army and greatly increased

the general confidence in a successful issue. Yet, splendid as was the response to the demands made upon the troops, it was apparent that much was lacking. The Boers, even when encumbered by men on foot, could still outstrip the fastest British columns. Where horses collapsed in scores on the Boer side they collapsed in hundreds on the British side, mainly owing to unskilled management, partly too to overweight and to the absence of any thorough system of supplying seasoned remounts. In the delicate art of checking a pursuit with a thin rearguard screen the Boers were still unrivalled. In cases where several columns were acting together, the necessity for dispersion was not fully grasped. With attention focussed on the spoor, there was a tendency to neglect the duty of covering a broad extent of ground and patrolling far to the flanks and front. Nor was the system of conveying orders or passing news by any means perfect. It is just possible, indeed, that a heliograph at Coles Kop on February 27 might have altered the course of the war; for a supreme effort at that moment and at the right point, even by the veriest handful of troops, might have just turned the scale. Lastly, every hour of the operations had thrown into stronger light the full delicacy and difficulty of the great problem of control. Never before had such a multitude of separate columns been manœuvred for one object. A network of railways and telegraphs, particularly in the midland district, where two critical phases of the chase took place, made the task of control much easier than in many other regions. Nevertheless, the higher command was never in sufficiently close sympathy with the needs of the moment; and when, as happened occasionally, the higher command lost touch with the operating columns, the need of a strong controlling hand to direct them on the spot was sorely felt. It was realized by his immediate pursuers from February 15 onwards that de Wet was a beaten man. From the 20th, at least, this realization should have governed the British strategy; yet the fixed idea that he was still bent on going south caused five columns to be locked up far from the scene of action, and allowed de Wet to skirt the Orange for 200 miles without meeting any more serious

obstacles than Paris's weak cordon and Byng's picket of fifteen men.

De Wet had failed,

So far as success was concerned, if honours were fairly divided, the British score was the longest. If the first object of the pursuers had been the capture of de Wet, then they had failed. If the first object of de Wet had been to draw away troops in his pursuit and thus enable Botha's plans to succeed, then he too, as the sequel will show, had also failed. But the strategic purpose of Kitchener had been attained; the raid to the south had been checked, and both Hertzog and de Wet driven out of Cape Colony. If de Wet displayed an activity and resource which stamped him for all time as an unrivalled partisan, outmarching and jockeying his foe at every point, he none the less left Cape Colony with the loss of many men, of all his artillery and transport, and, worst of all for his cause, with a considerable loss of prestige. His failure to stand and fight it out on a single occasion, entirely justified though it was by his circumstances, was a bad omen for the eventual success of the Boer cause, while his failure to gain recruits and the unpleasant recollections which his visit left in the minds of the Cape Dutchmen went far to destroy what chance there was of a general rising in the Colony.

but an unique chance had been missed.

And yet, if we broaden our view and endeavour to assign to the great hunt its true place in the history of the guerilla war, we cannot escape the conclusion that an unique opportunity had been missed; unique as regards the troops employed and unique as regards the opening given by the enemy. If the forces so hastily improvised for an unforeseen emergency had been able to do such excellent work, what might not be expected in the future from the same forces, enlightened by the lessons learnt and inspirited by the spectacle of a constantly fleeing enemy? Unfortunately the question was never answered, for the mounted army which had done the work was already melting away. The Colonials, who formed the largest proportion of the troops engaged in the hunt, and who did some of the best work, had either reached or were on the point of reaching the end of their term of service. It was the same with the Yeomanry, and

The melting mounted army.

THE THIRD OR GREAT
DE WET HUNT
ORANGE FREE STATE - CAPE COLONY
January-March 1901
Scale 26 miles = 1 inch
20 15 10 5 0 20 40 60
DIRECTIONS
Knox
Bruce Hamilton
Plumer's Columns
Bethune
Hickman
Henniker, Crabbe & Thorneycroft
Byng
Williams
Paris
De Wet
Hertzog & Brand
Figures refer to dates
m m morning
n n night
POSITIONS ON THE EVENING OF FEB. 27.
Same Scale
HOPETOWN
Knox
Orange River Stn
Bethune
Zoutpan's Drift
Luckhoff
FAURESMITH
Jagersfontein
Kraankuil
Paauwpan
Petrusville
Lemoenfn Drift
Tafel Kop
Bruce Hamilton
Potfontein
Basberg
Karbenatze Kraal
Henniker, Crabbe & Thorneycroft
Sand Drift
Riet Valley
Doorn Kloof
Kattegat
Hickman
Springfontein
PHILIPPOLIS
Lelief Drift
Hout Kraal
PHILIPSTOWN
Williams
Winkelhoek
Bothas Drift
Cradock
DE AAR
Rietfn
Coles Kop
COLESBERG
Norval's Pont
Taaiboschfn
Lowe
Hanover Road
HANOVER
NAAUWPOORT
KROONSTAD
Bloemhof
Hoopstad
Vaal River
Christiana
Fourteen Streams
Zand R.
Vet R.
Ventersburg Road
Ventersburg
Jan 27 noon
DE WET'S STARTING POINT
Jan 28 m
Doornberg
SENEKAL
Bultfontein
Smaldeel
DE WET'S FINISHING POINT 11th Mar.
Winburg
Leeuw Kop
Jan 26
Boshof
END OF HUNT 11-13 Mar.
Brandfort
Tabaksberg
Vaalbank
Fairfield
KIMBERLEY
Modder R.
Abrahams' Kraal 7-8
Petrusburg
BLOEMFONTEIN
31 Jan
Sannah's Post
Israel's Poort
Thaba Nchu
Springhaan's Nek
Ladybrand
Jacobsdal
DOUGLAS
Plumer
Riet R.
Bethanie
Sta.
Reddersburg
Feb. 1
Dewetsdorp
Bethune
FAURESMITH
Jagersfn
Edenburg
Wepener
BASUTOLAND
Luckhoff
Zuurfontein
Pompi Siding
5 Feb. Froneman
De Wet
Bokpost
Jagersfontein Road
Feb 7-8
SMITHFIELD
Springfontein
5-9 Feb
Caledon R.
Rouxville
BETHULIE
Knox & Bruce Hamilton (4 Feb.)
Odendaalstroom
Herschel
Essex 4 Feb
Norvals Pont
ALIWAL NORTH
Hallett & Herbert (4 Feb.)
Reads Dr.
Marks Drift
Saxen Dr.
Blaauw Kop
Mach Drift
Klip
Welgevonden
Gemsbok Vlakte
Brakkies
Vlegulands Put
Sand Dr.
Zoutpans Fn
Kranspan
Vrouw Pan
Verlaten Dam
Gras Vlakte
Du Toit's Draai
HOPETOWN
Essex
Elsjesvlakte
Geluks Poort
Orange River St.
Zoutpans Dr.
4 Feb
Old Drift
PRIESKA
Klip Dr.
Springbok Pan
Drinkwater
Karabee
Smidswater
Gous Pan
Winter Hoek
Kraan Kuil
Boschjesman's Dr.
Lombard Dr.
Vissers Dr.
Glade Dr.
Klein Vrach Kuil
Zwingels Pan
Strydenburg
Vlugpan
Kalk Kraal
Melk Kraal Drift
Beervlei
Paauw Pan
Kalkfn
Petrusville
Lemoenfn Dr.
Rietfontein
Potfontn
Onkerspoek
Basberg
Bartmanns Siding
Driekuilen
Venters Poort
Hout Kraal
Riet Valley
Sand Dr.
Doorn Kloof
Kalies Fn
PHILIPPOLIS
Lelie Fn Dr.
Venters Valley
Hamelfontn
PHILIPSTOWN
Winkelhoek
Bothas Drift
Priors Sid
Ketelfn
Zevenfn
Houwater
Britstown
16-24
16 Feb
DE AAR
Bettie
Rietfontien
COLESBERG
Taaibosch
Hanover Road
Rensburg
to Carnarvon 22 miles
HANOVER
NAAUWPOORT
Lyttelton (4 Feb.)
Zuurberg
BURGHERSDORP
Richmond Road
Sherborne
Steynsburg
Stormberg Junc.
VICTORIA WEST
Richmond
Schoembie
Victoria Road
to Murraysburg
MIDDELBURG
Royal Fusiliers (4 Feb)
Rosmead Junc.
CAPE COLONY
ORANGE FREE STATE

without these two categories the hunt could never have been prosecuted. It must be remembered that most of the cavalry engaged and about half the M.I., had only just arrived in South Africa.

De Wet's lesson.

Nor did de Wet ever again give so great an opening to his foes. Whatever may be thought of the big schemes hatched by the Boer leaders, it is certain that in the endeavour to carry them out they played into the hands of their enemy. In all guerilla wars the strength of the partisans has lain in their ability to concentrate and disperse at will, to deliver sudden and stinging strokes, and then to vanish, leaving their powerful but ponderous adversary to beat the air with a belated assemblage of troops.* To attempt too much, or to retain the guerilla force in being when its opportunity has passed, is to court heavy risks. These risks de Wet took, but the flooded Orange taught him a lesson which he never forgot. In that last week of February the stakes, indeed, were the highest possible; for few who read the subsequent chapters can doubt that the capture of Steyn and de Wet at this moment would have ended the war.

From the nervous activity of the hunt we pass now to describe the strangely different operations which, throughout the course of the hunt, had been proceeding in the Transvaal against Louis Botha.

* The most striking example is that of the Spanish guerillas against France. Whenever they attempted regular operations and courted pitched battles, they suffered crushing disasters. As orthodox guerillas they were very formidable.

CHAPTER VI

FRENCH IN THE EASTERN TRANSVAAL

(January–April, 1901)

The scene of the operations against Botha.

THE day after de Wet had left the Doornberg for his raid into Cape Colony the columns collected for the movement against Botha struck camp and marched to the east. Kitchener's conception for this movement was to make a clean sweep of the country between the Delagoa and Natal Railways by an eastward advance from Johannesburg to the Swazi and Zulu borders. Half the march was to lie across the rolling downs of the "high veld." This lofty tableland reaches its greatest elevation at the meridian of Ermelo, where it becomes the watershed of many great rivers; the Vaal flowing away to the south-west, the Olifant's to the north, while the Komati, the Assegai, the Pongola and a score of other rivers descend more or less abruptly to the "low veld" of the east and south-east. Viewed as a whole, the area of operations was a rough triangle, whose flattened apex on the west was formed by the section of railway between Pretoria and Johannesburg. The north-eastern angle, the mountainous Barberton district, was the only part not included in the scheme. The south-eastern angle is the wedge of low-lying country running deep down between the Natal, Swazi and Zulu frontiers. Here the undulating plains give place to a wild region containing many intricate mountain strongholds and pathless tracts of bush. From Johannesburg to the extremity of this angle the distance is 260 miles, and from Johannesburg to the nearest point on the Swazi border 175 miles. The whole of this great area

Map, p. 182.

was rich in crops and cattle; but from the strictly military point of view the high veld, with Ermelo, Bethal and Carolina as its principal village-centres, was the most important. It was here that General Botha found his best fighting men, and it was here that French's cavalry, in October 1900, had met with such bitter and dangerous opposition.* Since that time no column had penetrated for more than a few miles into the high veld.

Kitchener's design was to project a line of columns over the whole area, in the hope either of enveloping and annihilating the enemy in the neighbourhood of Ermelo or of driving them up against the Swazi and Zulu borders and there forcing them to surrender. Preparations were begun in the second week of January, and instructions for the movement were issued on the 24th, when rumours of de Wet's gathering in the Doornberg were just taking definite shape. The starting-point was a line drawn north and south from the Delagoa Railway to the Natal Railway and passing through Springs. On this base-line were drawn up the five columns which were to form the main driving line, the northernmost under Brig.-General Alderson, and the next four, counted in order from north to south, under Col. Eustace Knox, Lieut.-Col. Pulteney, Lieut.-Col. Allenby and the Natal officer Brig.-General Dartnell, who had done such good service in the earlier stages of the war. These four were controlled by French, who, at a later stage, when the great net had been contracted, was destined to take charge of the whole movement. Alderson's fighting strength was about 2,000, of whom half were his own M.I., together with eight guns and a pom-pom.† Of French's columns, Dartnell's, numbering 2,600 men, seven guns, and two pom-poms,‡ was considerably the largest.

Kitchener's design, Jan. 24.

The driving columns.

* See chap. ii, pp. 47–9.

† Alderson.—13th and 14th Bns. M.I. (1,000); Yorkshire L.I., Canadian Scouts (100 and one pom-pom); Vol. Co. M.I. (50); "J" Battery (six guns); "G" Battery (two guns).

‡ Dartnell.—Commander-in-Chief's Bodyguard (1,000 and two 15-pdrs.); Johannesburg M.R. (500); Gough's M.I. (280); 2nd N. Staffordshires (770); one 4·7 gun, 5th Co. E.D.R.G.A.; 74th Battery (four guns), 2 pom-poms.

Knox,* Allenby† and Pulteney,‡ had about 1,800 men apiece. Three-fifths of the whole force consisted of mounted troops, mainly drawn from cavalry regiments which had been armed, but only at the last moment, with rifles.

The flank columns.

The main driving line was to be set in motion on January 28, and to reach the meridian of Ermelo on February 6. As it advanced to the east it was to be joined successively by three columns from the north. These columns, under Major-Generals Paget and Smith-Dorrien and Colonel W. P. Campbell (Rifle Brigade), starting from points on the Delagoa Railway and moving first at right angles to and afterwards in line with French and Alderson, were gradually to converge on Ermelo, where the design was to envelop and destroy the enemy. Paget's column, with Plumer commanding the mounted troops, was to march from Balmoral on the 28th. Campbell,§ with 800 infantry, 300 mounted men and five guns, was to leave Middelburg on February 1, and on the same day Smith-Dorrien‖ with a strong force of 3,300 men (nearly two-thirds of whom were infantry), 10 guns and two pom-poms, was to march south from Wonderfontein to Carolina and Lake Chrissie. Only a week before, Smith-Dorrien had taken his whole column as far south as Carolina and thence back to the railway, meeting with persistent opposition and verifying the fact that Botha had collected a considerable force near Ermelo. These arrangements for

* E. Knox.—8th Hussars (400); 10th Hussars (440); 12th Lancers (350); 2nd R. Dublin Fusiliers (240); 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers (280); "Q" Battery (four guns); 28th Battery (two guns); one pom-pom "K" section, one Elswick gun.

† Allenby.—2nd Dragoon Guards (550); 6th Dragoon Guards (410); 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers (560); one 5-in. Howitzer, 87th Battery; "O" Battery (four guns); one Elswick gun, one pom-pom "E" section.

‡ Pulteney.—6th Dragoon Guards (440); 14th Hussars (two squadrons 330); 1st Scots Guards (960); one 5-in. Howitzer, 87th Battery; "T" Battery (six guns), one pom-pom "J" section.

§ W. P. Campbell.—18th Hussars (250); M.I., 1st King's R.R.C. (120); 1st Leicestershires (850); one 5-in. Howitzer; one 12-pdr. naval gun; 21st Battery (two guns); one pom-pom "P" section.

‖ Smith-Dorrien.—5th Lancers (300); 2nd I.L.H. (320); 3rd M.I. (400); 1st Suffolks (600); 2nd West Yorkshires (600); 1st Cameron Highlanders (750); 66th Battery (two guns); 83rd Battery (two guns); 84th Battery (four guns); two 5-in guns; two pom-poms, "S" section.

the strengthening of the left or northern flank of the driving line were disturbed at the eleventh hour by the news of de Wet's march on Cape Colony. On the point of starting out, Paget's column, including Plumer's fine body of Australians who were to do such excellent service in the de Wet hunt, was withdrawn and hurried south by rail to aid Lyttelton in meeting the raid. On the right, or southern, flank there was not the same need for throwing forward strengthening forces in advance of the driving line, since it was highly improbable that Botha would head towards the Orange Free State. One small column, however, under Colonel Colville, was deputed to move south of Dartnell, in order to cover the conveyance of supplies from the Natal Railway.

Supply.

Without counting this covering force, there were seven columns in the field, with a fighting strength of about 14,000 men and 58 guns and pom-poms. The feeding strength, however, including engineers, A.S.C., medical and telegraph units, drivers, &c., amounted to 21,000 men, 11,500 horses, and 9,000 mules. To supply this large and widely scattered force from two railways which diverged gradually as the triangular theatre of war widened out was a very difficult problem. Briefly, the arrangements made were as follows:— The five driving columns were to start with two days' supplies, half in mule-wagons and half in ox-wagons. Alderson, on the extreme north, was to depend on Paget and Campbell successively for the maintenance of his supplies at this level, and Smith-Dorrien, starting latest of all the columns, was to bring down to Lake Chrissie a large convoy of supplies, sufficient to feed his own column and the three just mentioned for twenty days longer. As we shall see later, Paget's removal from the scene upset this calculation. French's four columns were to fill up from the Natal Railway, through the medium of two successive convoys from Greylingstad and Standerton, the latter to reach him at Ermelo. After Ermelo was passed, the line of advance would become more southerly. The Delagoa Railway, therefore, could no longer be of any service, and all seven columns were to be supplied from Natal. Such, in bare outline, was the scheme of transport.

What a multiplicity of labour, how many temporary reductions of fighting strength—for all wagons, full or empty, had to be efficiently guarded—and what an exact adherence to dates and places were involved, may easily be imagined. Elasticity of movement, needful enough in regular war and far more needful in guerilla war, was rigidly limited at the outset.

Devastation and depopulation.

But this was not the only limitation. Kitchener was at last about to begin in earnest that scheme of universal devastation and deportation which he had set before his generals in the memorandum of December 21.* Under his present instructions, the columns were not only to endeavour to envelop the enemy, but were to clear the country systematically of supplies, horses, cattle, crops, transport-vehicles and non-combatant families. Explicit rules were issued for carrying out this object. Every farm was to be visited, and not only women and children, but natives living on farms, were to be sent to the railway by empty convoys. Supplies, wagons and standing crops, if they could not be used, were to be burnt. Bakeries and mills were to be destroyed. In view of the extent of the country to be traversed and its immunity hitherto from any such measures, this was a gigantic non-military labour to impose upon the troops. In order to give more time for the work and for that of exchanging convoys, two halts, of two days each in duration, were arranged on the way to Ermelo. It need scarcely be pointed out that all this was a hindrance to the attainment of the supreme object, the defeat of the enemy.

Kitchener's military instructions, Jan 24.

This object, nevertheless, Kitchener sought to further by strict injunctions as to the method of operations. Each column was to march on a broad front, sustaining actual touch with its neighbours and constant inter-communication by helio and lamp. Every inducement was to be offered to make the enemy fight and every precaution used to make him fight at a disadvantage. If a single column found itself resolutely opposed, it was not to force a decisive conflict, but to keep the enemy in play until other columns could draw in and envelop him with overwhelming

* See chap. iii, p. 86.

force. The story will show that all these rules, in effect, were counsels of perfection, and that the last, in particular, was one of very doubtful wisdom.

Beginning of the first phase, Jan. 27–Feb. 6.

On January 27 the five columns of the main driving line were all in their appointed places on a line thirty miles in length; Alderson on the north at Mooiplaats; Knox and Allenby at Bapsfontein and Putfontein respectively, and Pulteney and Dartnell at Springs. On the 28th, in very hot weather, they advanced an average of fifteen miles to the south-east, and encamped on the line shown in the map. Dartnell alone had met with opposition, and that of the slightest; but on the next day the Pretoria town commando and other local groups were found to be holding Boschman's Kop, immediately in front of Allenby. French's original intention had been that Pulteney should act in reserve, but Paget's withdrawal, made known to him on the 29th, had compelled him to bring Pulteney up into line. His mounted men, under Rimington, having now been brought up to hold the Boers in front while Allenby turned their right, the Boers retreated eastward covering the flight of a large convoy. That night the columns camped on or near the line of the Wilge River, where they remained for the two following days, clearing farms and reprovisioning from the convoy, which under Colville's escort was now passed up from Greylingstad. It was underloaded, unfortunately, to the extent of a fifth of its nominal capacity, so that French's force had to be put on three-quarter rations, an experience which was only a slight foretaste of hardships to come.

The start, Jan. 28.

Jan. 29.

Jan. 28–29, Beyers and Kemp have escaped.

The difficulty of maintaining touch, particularly at night, over such a wide front was already apparent; for Beyers and Kemp, with the commandos of Zoutpansberg, Waterberg and Krugersdorp, had managed to slip back through the line, and on the 29th had damaged the branch railway between Springs and Brakpan, burnt two mines at Benoni, and cut the field telegraph cable.* The remaining unit of

* For Beyers's previous movements, see chap. iv., pp. 109-112. He soon afterwards led the northern commandos back to their own districts, while Kemp returned with the Krugersdorp commando to De la Rey's command in the west.

Beyers's force, the Pretoria Town commando under Commandant Botman, together with all the local burghers along the whole line were in full retreat east, covering a terror-stricken exodus of old men, women and children, crowded into wagons with all that they could save of their property, and preceded by enormous herds of sheep and cattle.

The further advance, Feb. 1–3.

In the next stage, Paget and Plumer from Balmoral were to have reinforced the left. In their absence, Alderson and Knox were directed to incline a little to the north with wider intervals. This made mutual support still more difficult, and even communication was hard to maintain between the two leaders. The Boers might have found a loophole here, but they were not in the mood for adventure, so that the operations of February 1 and 2 were an almost exact repetition of those of the first stage. Pulteney and Allenby again found the bulk of the enemy, with five guns and a pom-pom, posted in front of them, prepared to fight dilatory rearguard actions to cover the retreat of the fugitives. On both days they gave way eventually to turning movements by Rimington's mounted troops and retired through Bethal towards Ermelo, leaving behind them a British gun with the breech blown out. Alderson, Knox and Dartnell were all engaged with small forces of the enemy. On February 3, when another halt was called, the positions were as follows:—Alderson at Welstand, Knox at Witbank, Pulteney at Syferfontein, Allenby at Rooiport, Dartnell at Vlakspruit. If we include Colville, who was at Meyersvlei, on the Standerton-Bethal road, this gave a front of forty miles, with the centre (Pulteney) about fifteen miles west of Bethal.

The northern columns start, Feb. 3.

On the same day the northern columns were set in motion. Campbell, issuing from Middelburg, reached Wolvefontein, fifteen miles south of the railway and the same distance north-east of Alderson; while Smith-Dorrien, marching southward from Wonderfontein, was at Twyfelaar, ten miles north-west of Carolina, and nearly thirty miles distant from Campbell. Thus, on the night of the 3rd, the seven British columns were disposed on an arc of sixty miles, looking towards Ermelo. It was now that Paget's loss was seriously

felt. The original driving line, from Dartnell northward to Alderson, was in tolerably compact order, with intervals of about eight miles; but, in spite of the modification of Alderson's line of march, there was a gap of nearly double that extent between him and Campbell, and of nearly treble that extent between Campbell and Smith-Dorrien. The weakness had already told; for Campbell had been hotly opposed by Chris Botha, and although he repelled the attack smartly,* some 300 Boers had slipped between him and Alderson and had broken away to the west. This was the second organised body to pierce the meshes of the net. Some faulty Staff work aggravated the weakness. Owing to an error in his instructions, Smith-Dorrien had begun his march too soon, and after some days of useless but very laborious marching in the direction of Carolina, had been called back to Wonderfontein. But neither the error nor its correction were made known to French, who believed that Smith-Dorrien, as the general instructions had contemplated, had reached Carolina on the evening of the 2nd.

Plan for enveloping Ermelo.

French now prepared for the converging movement on Ermelo. While Pulteney, in the centre, was to march slowly on the direct road from Bethal, both wings were to be pushed forward; Knox, Campbell and Alderson on the north; Pulteney and Dartnell on the south. These movements were to be completed in three marches, on the 4th, 5th and 6th, and at the end Pulteney would be at Ermelo itself, and the two wings well to the north-east and south-east respectively. In order to complete envelopment, French sent urgent orders to Smith-Dorrien to march on Meppel, eight miles due east of Ermelo. The message, despatched on the 4th, did not reach Smith-Dorrien till the morning of the 6th, when the strategical climax was over. In any case, Smith-Dorrien being a day's march further north than French believed, could scarcely have attained the end in view.

Botha's plans.

The British advance had shattered Botha's dream of

* A troop of the 18th Hussars was ambushed, but fought well and was extricated in gallant style by another troop and a party of the 60th Rifles M.I. under Lieutenants Crum and Beade. Sergeant Baker and Private Stork showed conspicuous courage.

invading Natal in force; but he was the last man to be taken tamely in a net; nor had he any intention of following in the wake of the eastward exodus. His hold over the burghers, never, of course, approaching the firm grip of a Commander-in-Chief over a regular disciplined army, was rendered still more doubtful by the temptation present to every burgher of following his household gods, his family and his cattle in their panic-stricken flight before the British; but he had with him strong detachments from the three fine commandos of Carolina, Ermelo and Bethal, and with these and the Pretoria Town commando, about 2,000 men in all, he determined not only to break back through the British line, but to attack one of the isolated columns before support could reach it. The rest of his burghers—fractions, namely, of the Utrecht, Piet Retief, Wakkerstroom, Vryheid and Standerton commandos, about 1,500 in all—were allowed to retreat to the east, covering the flight of the families and cattle.

Botha decides to attack Smith-Dorrien, who reaches Lake Chrissie on Feb. 5.

Botha was acting on interior lines; the slow British advance gave him plenty of time to select his objective, and the weak points were obvious. Both Smith-Dorrien and Campbell were isolated, but since their lines of march converged, it was necessary to strike at one or the other in good time. Campbell's force was the weakest, and Smith-Dorrien's far the strongest of all the British columns. On the other hand the latter was accompanied by an enormous convoy of supplies and ammunition which proved an irresistible temptation to the Boer general. By an audacious attack under cover of night he hoped to neutralise his enemy's superiority in men and guns, and with this object he marched north from Ermelo. On the evening of the 5th he was between that town and Lake Chrissie, and on the same evening Smith-Dorrien halted at Bothwell, near the northern extremity of the lake. It must be borne in mind that in leaving the railway on the 3rd and arriving here on the 5th Smith-Dorrien was punctually obeying Kitchener's orders, which held good until French's authority could make itself felt over the widely-extended but now slowly-contracting area of operations.

Lake Chrissie is little more than a glorified "pan," filling up in the rainy season and partially dry in times of drought. The tiny village of Bothwell stands close to the northern shore on the slope of a hill which rises gently for eighty feet to a level plateau. On this plateau the roads from Carolina, Ermelo and Swaziland (*via* Derby) meet, and here Smith-Dorrien camped his force. He had no warning of attack. That day's experience, indeed, had pointed the other way, for from the high ground near Vryheid Lake an immense convoy had been sighted fifteen miles to the south threading its way from Ermelo eastward, while a smaller one moved towards the same quarter from Lake Chrissie. Colonel Henry, commanding the mounted troops, had endeavoured, without success, to overtake the latter. A slight screen of riflemen had worried the column during the day, but everything pointed to the conclusion that the enemy were merely covering their retreat to Swaziland. The site for the camp, commanded from no surrounding point, was well chosen, and the arrangements for its defence were good. In the centre of the plateau were the transport and horse-lines and the artillery under Lieut.-Col. Bell-Irving, while the three regiments of the Infantry Brigade, under Colonel Spens, were disposed round the outer edge, each finding strong outposts for a section of the perimeter. The Cameron Highlanders took the south, the West Yorks the north-west, and the Suffolks the north-east. The pickets, posted on the slopes of the hill, were all strongly intrenched, alarm-posts were duly fixed at sunset, and if there seemed to be no great likelihood of an attack, there was at any rate no lack of vigilance among the officers and men upon whom the safety of the force that night depended.

Smith-Dorrien's position at Lake Chrissie.

While the camp in general slept, Louis Botha was moving rapidly up the road from Ermelo, which skirts the western border of the lake and then turns aside to pass through Bothwell. This brought him to the north-western face of the camp, defended by the West Yorks outposts, and here and on the north-east the weight of his attack fell, the Camerons feeling it but little. At 2.50 A.M. on the 6th, a tremendous fusillade broke out, followed immediately by a

Action of Lake Chrissie, Feb. 6.

rush of galloping hoofs through the crowded camp. The horses of the 5th Lancers and I.L.H. had stampeded, causing a great deal of the confusion on the plateau and an unsteadiness among some of the mounted corps which was greater than it need have been. It was pitch dark and misty, and, in short, all the elements of a great disaster were present; but the circle of infantry outposts, alert and absolutely steady, made an effectual rampart between the Boers and the masses on the hill above them. While the Suffolks were severely tested, the brunt of the attack was borne by the West Yorks. In the ranks of this regiment were several young drafts who, though this rude ordeal was their first experience of fighting, behaved as coolly and bravely as their veteran comrades. A mob of stampeding horses, which had galloped into the enemy's lines, was turned back by the Boers and driven up to the outpost line. Rushing in, under cover of the horses, a party of Boers overwhelmed and cut to pieces two of the West Yorks pickets. Lieutenant Cantor, bringing up the supporting company, was shot dead, and all his men, except one sergeant, were killed or wounded. The Suffolks, meanwhile, though suffering from a galling fire at close quarters, were receiving the enemy with steady volleys, whose sound spread confidence in the camp behind. There the losses were slight, for the Boers never penetrated the outposts on the slope of the hill, and consequently were never able to pour a direct fire upon the plateau.

The attack fails, but Botha effects a safe retreat.

Botha had staked success on surprise and a crushing volume of magazine fire. A very short time sufficed to prove that his calculations had failed. His gallant men were falling fast, and once the golden moment for an assault in force had gone by, persistence was futile. In three-quarters of an hour the Boer fire had slackened sensibly, and at 4.30 the enemy was in full retreat. Smith-Dorrien at once planned a pursuit, but with the first daylight there rose a thick fog which made it exceedingly difficult to ascertain the line to be taken. At 6 A.M., however, Colonel Henry and the mounted troops picked up the trail of the Carolina commando, which had headed to the north-west, and followed it for seven miles to Mooiplaats,

harassing the stragglers with rifle and shell-fire and turning the retreat to a flight; but he failed to reach the main body of the commando, which had too long a start and now disappeared from the area of the drive, passing round Campbell's left. Of the rest of Botha's force some went north and some south-east, but nearly all succeeded ultimately in circling round Smith-Dorrien and reaching safety in rear of the driving columns. Botha's losses in the night attack were about 80, including Field-Cornet Spruyt of Heidelberg. The British casualties were 75, and the additional loss of 300 horses, stampeded or killed, was sufficient to cripple Smith-Dorrien temporarily. French's messenger bearing the order for an immediate advance to Meppel, arrived just after the fight, but Smith-Dorrien found it impossible to comply.

The other columns close on Ermelo, Feb. 4–6.

In two marches, on the 4th and 5th, the five columns of the main driving line, lessening their intervals as they advanced, with Pulteney a little in rear, had reached the line of the Kaffir Spruit, which passes six miles west of Ermelo and runs south to join the Vaal. French had hoped that the Boers would defend this line in force, but the hope was vain. The great exodus rolled on ceaselessly, and behind it the covering commandos fell back. On the 6th, which was the culminating day of the movement, Pulteney entered Ermelo, and found it, like Bethal, almost deserted. Knox and Alderson were four and eight miles north of it. Campbell, working slowly into his place in the line, was near the source of the Vaal, six miles north of Alderson. The bulk of the Boer fugitives were in front of Allenby at the southern end of the line, hurrying along the road to Piet Retief, which crosses the Vaal by a difficult drift at Witpunt, twelve miles south-east of Ermelo. French directed Allenby to push forward to this drift and at the same time drew in Dartnell at a sharp angle to support him. But it was too late. A strong commando, fighting a clever rearguard action, delayed Allenby for several hours on the Lang-en-Smal ridge; Dartnell was too far away to intervene with effect; and in the evening when Allenby reached the drift, clouds of dust on the eastern

horizon told their tale plainly. Late in the day he sent a squadron of Carabiniers to Meppel, to join hands with Smith-Dorrien and complete the cordon round Ermelo; but Smith-Dorrien, as we have seen, was eighteen miles to the north. Even had he reached Meppel, he could have been of no use; for the crucial point on this day was Witpunt Drift, seven miles further to the south.

Summary of the first phase.

Thus ended the first and most important phase of the operations. Under the British scheme three days' halt were necessary on the line now reached for clearing the country and reprovisioning the columns from Smith-Dorrien's convoy on the north and from Standerton on the south. Strategically, the British movement had failed. Beyers and Kemp had disappeared. Botha, it is true, had failed in a brilliant tactical effort; but he himself and the best of his troops had broken through or round the British lines and were soon to be back in their own country, reoccupying towns and villages, gathering scattered stock, drawing out hidden food-stores, and, in short, rendering the work of the columns almost useless. At the same time the commandos covering the exodus had done their work skilfully. Their losses had been trivial; none had been brought to decisive action; and now they had a breathing-space in which still further to outdistance their pursuers. It is just possible that had Smith-Dorrien's march been timed a day earlier, the military results of the movement might have been somewhat different. But even this is insecure conjecture. The extent of country traversed, the composition of the columns, the wide gaps which separated them, and their very slow advance are sufficient explanation of failure. None the less, the irresistible advance of so large a force over a country hitherto immune from any but the most harmless operations, together with the organised pillage and destruction which accompanied that force, brought home for the first time to the inhabitants the full terrors of war, and the power and purpose of their enemy.

Beginning of the second phase, Feb. 7–18.

French now took command of all seven columns, and prepared for the next phase. His first step was to re-extend his right flank, so as to check any attempt to break back in that

quarter. Dartnell, therefore, was sent to Amersfoort, and arrived there on the 8th. Meanwhile, reconnaissances having proved that Botha was out of striking distance, French made arrangements for the whole line to wheel half-right, pivoting on Dartnell, and thus to push forward to the Swazi border, converging on Amsterdam and Piet Retief, where he hoped this time to succeed in surrounding the rest of the Boer forces. The left wing, formed by the columns of Campbell, Alderson and Smith-Dorrien, and provisioned up to the 20th from the convoy brought by the latter general, was to begin extending on the 9th. The right wing was to start as soon as it had filled up from the convoy sent into Standerton. This convoy, under Colville's escort, arrived at Ermelo on the night of the 10th, and Pulteney was able to march on the 11th, Knox and Allenby on the 12th. Dartnell's column, on the extreme right, was delayed till the 13th.

Growing gravity of the problem of supply.

As a necessary precaution in view of the growing gravity of the problem of the supply, all the columns of the right wing had to be put again on three-quarter rations and the horses on half rations. The provisions now in possession of the force were calculated to carry it to the Swazi border, with a slight margin in favour of the left wing. After that entire reliance was to be placed on Natal, where Hildyard was arranging for the despatch of convoys from Newcastle to Piet Retief, via Utrecht and Luneburg. The first of these convoys was due at Piet Retief on the 18th, but the march from Natal was long and difficult, and the fear that the convoy might not be punctual proved to be only too well-founded. This was only one of the difficulties which began to thicken about French. The country, which, as far as Ermelo, had been comparatively easy, grew exceedingly difficult further east, where the high veld declines to rugged hills and boggy valleys, intersected by rivers unfordable in periods of flood. And a period of flood was imminent. As early as the 8th the sultry weather turned to rain, intermittent at first, but sufficient to render the few roads very heavy for wagons.

Other difficulties.

The columns resume the march, Feb. 9–14.

On the 9th, Smith-Dorrien marched north-east from Bothwell, and at once gained contact with the enemy. The I L.H. under Colonel McKenzie, rode down a Boer convoy of

fifty wagons and killed or captured thirty burghers. On the 14th, after six days of laborious marching, during which his Engineers three times had to bridge swollen rivers (the Umpilusi twice and the Usutu once), Smith-Dorrien dropped down into Amsterdam from the north, with a great spoil of cattle but very little beside. Campbell who had been acting under his orders, and had been marching slightly south and in rear of him, arrived there on the same day. Alderson, coming from a point north of Ermelo, came into line on the south, reaching Derby on the 15th. In the meantime French's centre had been put in motion. Pulteney evacuated Ermelo on the 11th, and, together with Knox, crossed the Vaal at Witpunt Drift on the 12th. The two columns then diverged, Knox proceeding to the south-east and Pulteney more to the south, while Allenby, who had crossed the Vaal by a lower drift, came into line on Pulteney's right. The main body of the Boers and the bulk of their flocks and wagons were soon found to be in front of Pulteney, trekking hastily to the south-east; but, as usual, a boldly handled rearguard interposed between the British and the fugitives. Posted on the Welgevonden ridges, this rearguard, numbering about 600, was dislodged only after several hours of combat, culminating in an incident of a very unusual sort. Pulteney, finding the 14th Hussars checked in the centre, sent Rimington and the Inniskilling Dragoons round to the left, with orders to charge the Boers in flank. Rimington carried out the order with considerable success. Rifles were slung, swords drawn, and although the ground was unfavourable, three wire fences having to be cut successively, "C" Squadron, under Lieutenant Johnson, managed to charge home and kill or capture some twenty Boers. The rest fled in disorder, leaving a number of wagons and 1,000 cattle in British hands. The episode is tantalizing. Had it heralded a tactical revolution, with the cavalry as pioneers, the war might have been greatly shortened. Unfortunately it was left to the Boers to develop charging tactics; and the rifle, not the sword, gave these tactics their efficacy. On the same evening another body of 500 Boers attempted to break back round Pulteney's right, but was stopped by a prompt extension of Allenby's left.

Completion of the second phase, Feb. 18.

On the 13th, Dartnell, on the extreme right, joined in the general advance. Leaving Amersfoort and making a wide sweep to the south-east, he plunged with his mounted men into the rugged and intricate Slangapiesberg, while his transport and infantry made a detour nearly as far south as Wakkerstroom. Allenby helped him by covering the northern slopes of the range, but cattle and a few wagons were the only fruits of their joint efforts. On the 17th Dartnell marched to Luneburg, where, under the scheme for supplying French's army, he was to have met the Natal convoy and carried it on towards Piet Retief. Nothing, however, was to be heard of it, so Dartnell turned northward, crossed the Intombi River, which, though heavy rain had set in, was still just fordable, and on the 18th ended his prescribed march by camping at Marienthal, 11 miles south of Piet Retief. The latter town had been occupied by Knox and Pulteney on the 16th, so that the second phase of French's movement was now complete. Seven British columns stood on a line of 40 miles along the Swazi border, from Amsterdam on the north, to Marienthal on the south. Outlying posts were thrown out to the frontier itself, and Allenby's column was posted at Zandbank, where the Assegai River descends into the gorges of the Swazi mountains.

The results.

Viewed as an attempt to envelop organised forces of the enemy the movement had again failed. One commando, that of Piet Retief, had fled into Swaziland, whence it was soon to be expelled by the joint exertions of the Swazis and the British; a few parties had broken back to the west; but most of the burghers, sacrificing wagons, guns and families in their precipitate flight, had succeeded in escaping to the south before Dartnell was sufficiently advanced to stop them, and were now trekking into the deep angle formed by the Natal and Zulu frontiers. At this juncture a cordon of small columns placed from Utrecht to the Swazi frontier might have been invaluable, and Kitchener, when the drive was originally planned, had, in fact, intended that Hildyard should block some of the passes with troops from Natal. Hildyard, however, had not men enough even to escort the heavy convoys which he had to send to Piet Retief for the

supply of French's columns and was compelled to borrow 1,000 men from Rundle to assist him in this work. French was incapacitated from pursuing to the south until he had received these convoys, and at the critical moment the whole system of supply from Natal broke down.

Hildyard's supply arrangements, Feb. 13.

It was on the 10th only, that Hildyard received explicit instructions to send nine days' rations for 12,000 men and 15,600 animals from Newcastle to Luneburg. On the 18th, at Luneburg, the convoy was to be met by Dartnell and escorted by him to the north. This first consignment of stores was intended to provision the four southern columns. By the 19th a second instalment nearly as large was to reach Luneburg to supply the wants of the three northern columns. With commendable energy in the short time allowed him, Hildyard collected the necessary transport from various towns in northern Natal, and on the 12th the greater part of the first convoy of 190 wagons, escorted by 1,000 men and six guns, under Brig.-General Burn-Murdoch,* left Newcastle. The last of these wagons reached Utrecht late on the next night.

Difficulties before Burn-Murdoch's convoy.

It is thirty-five miles from Utrecht to Luneburg. The road, which had never before been used by the British, was suspected to be in very bad condition and was known to mount heavy gradients and to lead over three substantial rivers, beside some minor spruits. Rain had already fallen, and more was imminent. The convoy, so hastily requisitioned from so many different sources, was overloaded and in bad order for the road, with a serious scarcity of conductors and an entire lack of spare gear. Nothing was known about the enemy, save that small bands for months had been hovering in the vicinity, together with the vague rumour that commandos flying before French were likely to pour into the district. A reconnaissance made on the 13th by Colonel Evans and the mounted troops had been opposed nine miles out by a small number of Boers, who might well

* Burn-Murdoch's force.—1st Royal Dragoons, 120; 5th Dragoon Guards, 100; Natal Vol. Composite Regt., 220; four guns 19th Battery; 200 details. 2nd Middlesex (four companies), 2nd Royal Lancasters (one company), 1st R. Dublin Fusiliers (one company), two 12-pdrs.

have been the precursors of a large force. On the other hand, Burn-Murdoch's left flank was covered, though at a considerable distance, not only by Dartnell's advance, but by an additional force under Colonel Bullock, thrown out by Hildyard from Volksrust to Castrol Nek.

The convoy blocked by floods, Feb. 19–22

Considering the road, the shortcomings of the convoy, and the weather, it may be doubted whether it was physically possible to carry the supplies as far as Luneburg within the appointed time. On the first two days, the 14th and 15th, struggling painfully up a long and steep ascent, the convoy was able to cover a total distance of only nine miles, encamping at Vaalbank. Instead of pushing forward his mounted troops on these two days in order to clear up the situation in front and to gain touch with Dartnell, Burn-Murdoch made the mistake of keeping them close to the convoy. The error bore fruit on the following day, when a heavy mist prevailed, interrupting all communication, and, in the absence of knowledge as to safety of the road ahead, compelling the column to remain halted. This delay destroyed the last chance, faint as it was, of getting the convoy through in time. On the 17th the rain came down in torrents; three execrable drifts were met with, and, by extraordinary exertions, safely crossed; but a final drift at the Pivaan River was too much for the exhausted cattle, and only six miles in all were covered. For six days the rain fell unceasingly, turning the road to a quagmire and the rivers on the line of route to deep and impassable torrents. Most of the convoy became absolutely bogged on the muddy slopes of the Elandsberg; and, five miles from Luneburg, the foaming waters of the Chaka Spruit opposed a final barrier to the progress of the few wagons that managed to reach it on the 22nd. Burn-Murdoch had no bridging materials, and the first driblets of supply to cross the Spruit were transported by means of a wire rope and received by Rimington, who had been sent down with his cavalry and guns to meet Burn-Murdoch, but who, in his turn, found the path behind him barred by a flood in the Pongola River. Nor was this the last obstacle between French at Piet Retief and his supplies on the road from Natal; for a little north of Luneburg the

Total breakdown of supply arrangements for French's force.

Intombi, and, near Piet Retief, the Assegai were both swollen torrents. The Intombi was bridged by Major Karri Davies, of Dartnell's column, on the 27th. Of the other rivers and spruits some occasionally fell enough to permit of wagons crossing them; in other cases wire ropes, pontoons, or rafts were used, and by these slow means, and by the unremitting exertions of all concerned, French was enabled to make the first issue of rations to his famished southern columns on March 2. Not till March 7 was his whole force placed on full rations, and then only for a few days; while for a fortnight later his horses had only a paltry allowance of oats, and his mules no forage at all.

Other lines of supply opened, Feb. 28–March 21.

The initial error underlying this wholesale collapse in the system of supply was Kitchener's choice, on insufficient information, of the Utrecht-Luneburg line as the channel for traffic. A better line existed, *via* Volksrust and Wakkerstroom and thence to Piet Retief; and, on French's suggestion, this supplementary line was opened on February 28. Even here the swollen Ingogi and Assegai Rivers caused delay, but Colonel Bullock succeeded in bringing in two heavy convoys on March 5th and 21st. Without this welcome aid, French might have lost his liberty of action during an indefinitely longer period; for from the 6th to the 13th of March another entire week of rain reduced the Utrecht-Luneburg road almost to the point of obliteration. It was abandoned altogether on the 16th and a third line opened from Vryheid to Paul Pietersburg.

Hardships of the troops.

Meanwhile the troops had been severely tried. On February 20 the four southern columns ran out of all supplies and had to live on the country for more than a fortnight. The northern columns by doling out small rations managed to eke out their provisions till the 26th, and after that date the whole force was in the same plight. Though there was plenty of fresh meat, mealies were scarce, and it was only by bribing the Kaffirs to dig up their hidden stores that a scanty ration of mealie flour could be distributed to the men. The long and dismal period of saturation and semi-starvation was borne by French's troops with a cheerful fortitude which deserves the warmest admiration.

Health was good and spirits were high. Nor was this period of comparative inaction without its compensations. Hitherto, the columns, while moving too slowly to surround the commandos, had moved too fast to clear the country thoroughly. But there was now time for a drastic clearance from Amsterdam to Luneburg. Farms were ransacked, several hundred surrenders taken, large quantities of ammunition and rifles discovered, and seven buried guns dug up; a Creusot, a howitzer, two 12-pounder Krupps and two light French guns. Smith-Dorrien was able to send his mounted men, under Colonel Henry, into Swaziland on the track of the Piet Retief commando. Henry, leaving Amsterdam on February 28, penetrated for some distance into the Swazi mountains and in the course of an ably-conducted expedition lasting eleven days captured most of the Boer convoy and cattle and took 100 prisoners. Clearing work.

The last ten days of February and the whole of March may be said to constitute the third phase of the movement in the Eastern Transvaal; French holding the line of the Swazi border and Hildyard joining hands with him from Natal. Beyond an occasional small skirmish there were no hostilities and no concerted offensive action. During the latter half of March, however, when the weather improved and supplies became regular, French slowly moved his various units southward in preparation for the fourth and final phase—the operations in the angle between Natal, Swaziland and Zululand. Dartnell and Pulteney came down to Vryheid, which was made the southern advanced base (itself supplied from Dundee); Alderson followed them, and after constructing a pontoon bridge at Jagd Drift on the Pongola, took post at Welgevonden, twelve miles north of Vryheid. These three columns constituted the driving line which was to advance eastward towards the district wedged in between the Swazi and Zulu frontiers. Knox prolonged the line to the north, halting at the bridge over the Pivaan; his function being to clear the angle between the Pivaan and the Pongola, and to block all channels of escape to the westward. French prepares for the fourth phase (end of March).

Campbell, Allenby and Smith-Dorrien, controlled for the

Smith-Dorrien's northern cordon.

present purpose by the last-named general, were left north of the Pongola, disposed on an arc, of which Piet Retief was the summit and the Pongola the base. At the western extremity a detachment from Smith-Dorrien's column guarded the bridge at Jagd Drift, with a post at Spein Koppies, half-way to Piet Retief; Allenby, at the eastern extremity, held Langdraai Drift and joined with Campbell in planting posts along the Swazi border. Smith-Dorrien, with most of his own force, remained at Piet Retief itself, superintending the distribution of supplies, which for these northern columns still came, under the escort of Colonel Bullock, from Volksrust. On March 26 these dispositions were completed, and French's force, with a fighting strength now reduced to 13,000, was extended over 120 miles of country, lining two sides of a great triangle, whose corners were Vryheid, Piet Retief and Langdraai Drift. On paper these dispositions resembled those at the beginning of the first phase; in reality there was very little in common between the two cases. The cordon now formed by the northern columns was stationary, and could not have been otherwise; for it was hard enough to feed the troops where they stood, without attempting to keep them fed in a march far to the south. The only driving momentum, therefore, was to come from the three southern columns. The area threatened by these was almost destitute of roads practicable for transport. The troops were in good fettle, but the horses had suffered terribly from wet and want of forage, and the raw remounts sent up from Natal were but small compensation. This weakness was just as serious for the stationary detachments, who, of course, had to patrol the gaps in their cordon.

Preparations complete, March 26.

Weaknesses.

Boer movements.

It is true that the area to be driven was in the nature of a *cul-de-sac*, theoretically offering to the Boers within it the choice of laying down their arms in Zululand or surrendering to French. But the Boers had not been idle during the long respite allowed them. Sodden and despondent, they were at any rate at home, able to fend for themselves far better than the British, and able to profit by their knowledge of the country to hide and evade. Many were already outside and behind the cordon, ensconced in the Schurweberg, the

Pongola Bosch, the Slangapiesberg; well-nigh pathless districts whither it was hopeless now to follow them. The Piet Retief men had settled down to snipe at the occupiers of their native town. Others, though within the cordon, were safe from pursuit in such lairs as the Ngomi Forest, east of Vryheid; others were as far south as Berthasdorp, outside the limits of the drive. The largest organised body within reach of the driving columns was the Vryheid commando of about 600 men, under General Cherry Emmett and Commandant Grobelaar. This commando was laagered at Boschhoek, an eyrie in the mountains east of Vryheid; thoroughly on its guard, however, with a screen of pickets thrown out to the west. Two other bodies formed from the Swaziland, Amsterdam and Standerton commandos, under Chris Botha, Oppermann and Mears, were in the Pongola valley, beginning to trek to the north-west towards Smith-Dorrien's cordon.

Operations of the fourth phase, March 27–April 13.

On March 27, the three active columns advanced eastward, Dartnell in the centre, Alderson on the left and Pulteney on the right. By the 30th, however, they had ceased to constitute a driving line. Pulteney, urgently needed by Kitchener for another great movement in the north-eastern Transvaal, returned with his column to Natal. Dartnell and Alderson, having advanced thirty and twenty miles respectively over broken and boggy country, now found the roads impassable, and had to form depôts,* where they left their infantry and heavy guns to make forays with their mounted men. These expeditions resolved themselves into a stern chase of the Vryheid men. On the 31st, Emmett was engaged at Smaldeel, losing a score of wagons and as many prisoners to Dartnell, and some more on the three following days to Alderson and Knox, but getting clear away to the north. Grobelaar doubled to the south of Vryheid, and French, though he was beginning to suffer from fever, rapidly improvised a combination to entrap him, drawing Knox down to the east of Vryheid, planting Dartnell a little to the east of Knox, and throwing Alderson across the Dundee-Vryheid road, while Hildyard guarded

* Dartnell at Toovernaarsrust, Alderson at Allendale.

the adjacent Natal border and the Blood River drifts. It was in vain. Knox could not get down in time; Dartnell's troops were too tired, and on April 6, Grobelaar slipped between the two and escaped. Alderson took one more cast to the south and east, but alone and with exhausted horses he could do little or nothing. On April 13th he returned to Vryheid and thence came into Natal, whither Dartnell and Knox had preceded him.

The Boers pass Smith-Dorrien's cordon.

North of the Pongola, Smith-Dorrien's thin cordon had been powerless to stem the northward tide of Boers. Allenby and Campbell on the Swazi border had been as active as their small bodies of mounted men and the condition of their horses had permitted them. On the 31st, the former had seized a gun and two pom-poms at Langdraai Drift, while the latter, on the same day, had taken a few prisoners and wagons at De Kraalen Drift on the Assegai. The rest of this commando found an outlet between Piet Retief and the Swazi border, while Chris Botha, Oppermann, Mears and Emmett, safely crossed the line of posts between Piet Retief and Jagd Drift and threatened Smith-Dorrien's line of supply from Wakkerstroom. This latter line had been strengthened by intermediate posts, and constituted a second and outer cordon. With all allowance for the difficult conditions, it nevertheless was not creditable that these commandos should have been allowed to penetrate both lines absolutely unscathed. The Boers concerned, unanimated by a spark of enterprise, should have been hustled at all costs, even by inferior forces.

Smith-Dorrien marches north.

Smith-Dorrien now concentrated the northern columns at Piet Retief, and, on the 14th, marched north to the Delagoa Railway, harassed intermittently by the commandos which had settled anew in their old haunts. With weak horses and no margin of supplies, he could do no more than make the best of his way to Wonderfontein, which he reached at the end of the month.*

Total results of French's movement.

Thus ended the first great drive of the guerilla war. It was reckoned that 1,332 burghers had been placed *hors de combat*—369 by death or wounds (an approximate estimate,

* Smith-Dorrien now left South Africa to take up the appointment of Adjutant-General in India.

certainly too high), 233 by capture, and 730 by voluntary surrender. There fell into British hands 11 guns, 2,300 vehicles, 272,000 rounds of small-arm ammunition, between 7,000 and 8,000 horses and mules, and a quantity of cattle and sheep which it would be profitless to reckon, since through sheer inability to keep or kill them the greater part escaped. It was an impressive yet a somewhat illusory table of results. Guns without ammunition were of no value to the Boers. The great bulk of the vehicles and stock captured had no immediate military value, but were the first-fruits, as far as this district was concerned, of the new policy of rendering the country uninhabitable and uninhabited. In *personnel,* the Boer losses, heavy on paper, were light in fact. It was not yet realised how little reliance could be placed on the returns of Boers led into captivity. In this instance, after eliminating those who never could or never would fight, persons over-age, under-age, or who wanted only the barest excuse for surrender, the net reduction of the Boer fighting strength was trifling. As an equivalent for the labour of 14,000 men during ten weeks, it was certainly not satisfactory.

Comments on the new military policy.

It is true that Botha's projected raid on Natal had been nipped in the bud, and that after a long period of impotence and disaster a strong initiative had been taken. The movement was ably conducted by French in the teeth of very great difficulties, and the behaviour of the troops was admirable. But the methods were far too stereotyped and formal for a war of this kind. To deal successfully with partisans, their methods must be studied and imitated. Mobility, stratagem and, above all, individual enterprise and dash, these were the secrets of success. Though achievement had fallen short of the ideal, these were the ends held steadily in view during the operations against de Wet, from the Bothaville campaign of November 1900 to the great de Wet hunt of February 1901. But the ponderous machine wielded by French in the Eastern Transvaal embodied ideals wholly different. It was sought to combine two incompatible ends, the defeat of the enemy and the devastation of his country, and in the endeavour to give expression to this hybrid policy, tactical enterprise was sacrificed to a lifeless strategy. The precision enjoined and

The double aim.

attained, while gaining one end, defeated others. It enabled a large force, operating far from railways, to obtain, weather permitting, regular supplies, and to forward its spoils and captives to places of safety; but it checked the spirit of initiative, and it tended to obscure the important duties of bridging gaps between columns and maintaining effective contact with the enemy by skilled scouting and a vigorous offensive.

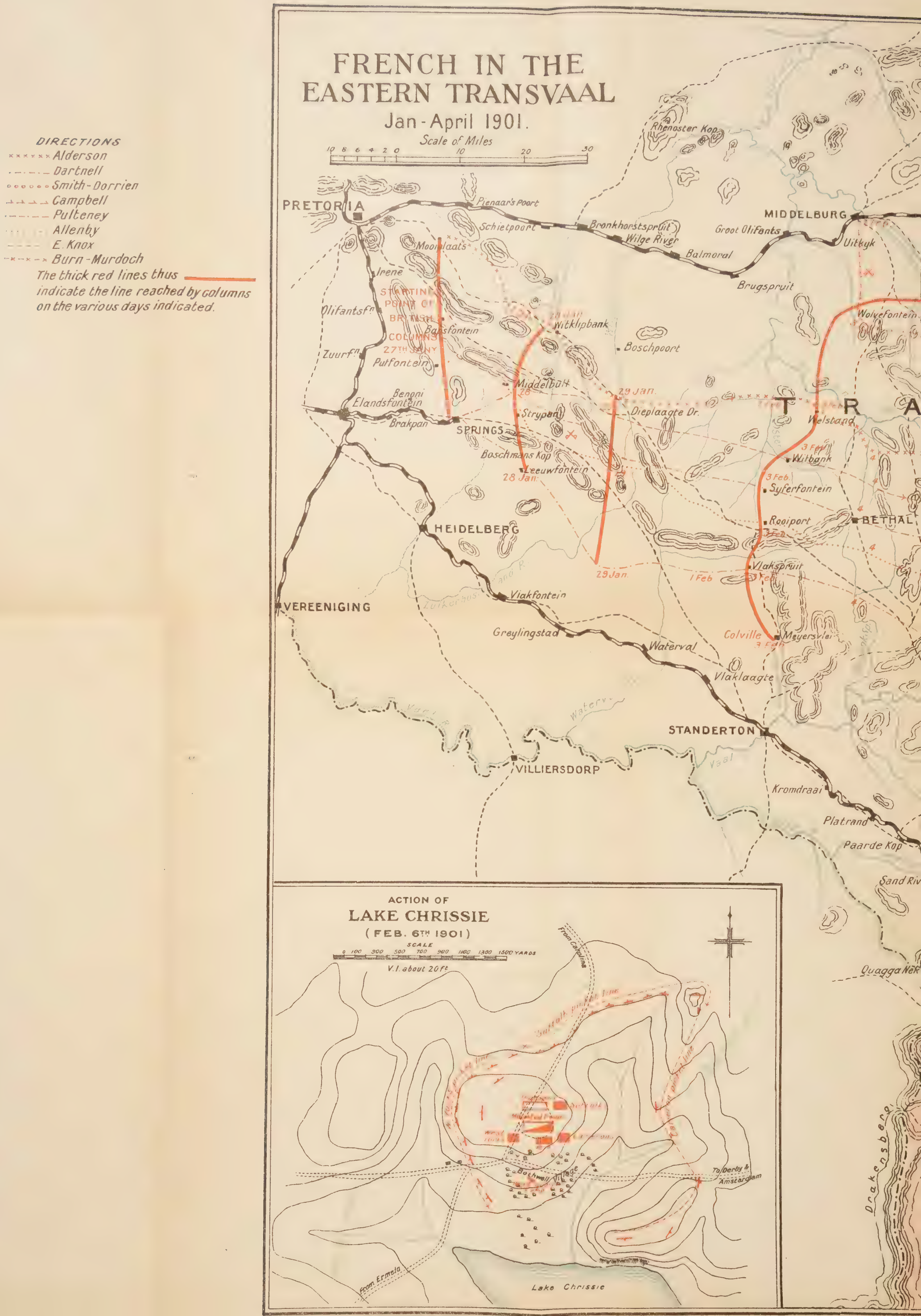
Kitchener's difficulties.

While it requires little insight to make these strictures, it must never be forgotten that Kitchener's difficulties were immense. At the time the movement was planned it was of urgent importance that a big demonstration of some sort should be made without delay and with such resources as were available. With the materials at his command, it is hard to see how Kitchener could have placed in the field a force which, judged by the required standard, was really mobile and effective. The mounted troops, from whom alone the offensive impulse could come, were far more backward in the right sort of training than those which had borne the brunt of the de Wet hunt and had so nearly carried it to a successful issue. Lake Chrissie showed that for defensive purposes infantry were still necessary, and when the speed of the movement was governed by the pace of infantry and the exigencies of transport, it cannot be said that the great weight of artillery carried, including such strange adjuncts to guerilla warfare as howitzers and 5-inch guns, was any practical hindrance to the mobility of the force; though it did have a baneful effect in confusing and retarding tactical ideas. The pity was that the drive established a tradition. That bulky table of results, subjected to no stern and illuminating analysis, was the forerunner of many hundreds of equally misleading documents. Attention was diverted from the highest military ideal; and although there were to be some brilliant and fruitful variations from the accepted principles, the methods and spirit inculcated in the great eastern movement became, for better or worse, permanent.

A bad tradition established.

The effect on the Boer mind of French's movement.

Meanwhile, there had been a short period when it seemed just possible that the civil terror and disorganisation produced by the great advance would cow the Boers into submission. That period we shall now describe.


FRENCH IN THE
EASTERN TRANSVAAL
Jan-April 1901.
Scale of Miles
10 8 6 4 2 0 10 20 30
DIRECTIONS
Alderson
Dartnell
Smith-Dorrien
Campbell
Pulteney
Allenby
E. Knox
Burn-Murdoch
The thick red lines thus indicate the line reached by columns on the various days indicated.
PRETORIA
Pienaar's Poort
Schietpoort
Bronkhorstspruit
Wilge River
Balmoral
Brugspruit
Groot Olifants
MIDDELBURG
Uitkyk
Rhenoster Kop
Mooiplaats
Irene
STARTING POINT OF BRITISH COLUMNS 27TH JANY
Olifantsfn
Bassfontein
Zuurfn
Putfontein
Witklipbank
Boschpoort
Middelbult
Benoni
Elandsfontein
Brakpan
SPRINGS
Strypan
Dieplaagte Dr.
Boschmans Kop
Leeuwfontein
28 Jan.
29 Jan.
Wolvefontein
Welstand
Witbank
Syferfontein
Rooiport
BETHAL
HEIDELBERG
Vlakspruit
1 Feb
Vlakfontein
VEREENIGING
Greylingstad
Waterval
Colville
Meyersvlei
Vlaklaagte
STANDERTON
VILLIERSDORP
Kromdraai
Platrand
Paarde Kop
Sand Riv
Quagga Nek
Drakensberg
ACTION OF
LAKE CHRISSIE
(FEB. 6TH 1901)
SCALE
0 100 300 500 700 900 1100 1300 1500 YARDS
V.I. about 20 ft
From Carolina
Bothwell Village
To Derby & Amsterdam
From Ermelo
Lake Chrissie

Alkmaar
Elandshoek
Nelspruit
Crocodile Poort
Hector Spruit
KOMATI POORT
Malelane
Kaapmuiden
Godmaan
Machadodorp
Waterval Onder
Nooitgedacht
BELFAST
Pan Sta.
Dalmanutha
Wonderfontein
Avoca
BARBERTON
Komati R.
3 Feb
Twyfelaar
CAROLINA
4
STEYNSDORP
Vryheid Lake
Mooiplaats
Bothwell
6 Feb
Lake Chrissie
Umpilusi R.
12 Feb
Mountainous
S W A Z I
L A N D
FRONTIER
Meppel
ERMELO
BREMERSDORP
Uitkomst
Witpunt
AMSTERDAM
Lang-en-Smal
Brakfontein
Welgevonden
Valven Kop
Derby
3rd Phase
AMERSFOORT
Annyspruit
PIET RETIEF
Zandbank
Mahamba Drift
De Kraalen drift
Spein Koppies
Mountainous
Slangapiesberg
Marienthal
Jagt drift
LUNEBERG
Pongola Bosch
Castrol Nek
VOLKSRUST
WAKKERSTROOM
Rimington
PAUL PIETERSBURG
31 Mar
Charlestown
Belelasberg
Elandsberg
Bridge
Langdraai drift
Vaalbank
UTRECHT
Welgevonden
Allendale
Yorkshire
Smaldeel
Bothas Pass
Wools drift
Hlobane Mtn
Umkuzane R.
NEWCASTLE
Hildyard
Staels drift
VRYHEID
Blood River Poort
Pondwana Mts
Boschhoek
Mullers Pass
Ingagane
Leeuwnek
Tovernaar's Rust
Intabankulu
Ngomi Forest
Z U L U
L A N D
N A T A L
Dannhauser
De Jagers drift
Landmans drift
NQUTU
Nondweni
GLENCOE
DUNDEE
To Pomeroy
To Hoppetown
To Rietfontein

CHAPTER VII

THE MIDDELBURG CONFERENCE

(February–March, 1901)

Botha receives a message from Kitchener, Feb. 13.

On February 13, a week after the failure of his night attack at Lake Chrissie, Louis Botha received, through his wife, a verbal message from Kitchener. If General Botha desired it, so the message ran, a meeting could be held with the British Commander-in-Chief to arrange terms of peace; the one condition being that the question of the independence of the two republics was not to be discussed in any way. The invitation arrived at an opportune moment; for Botha, though he had effectively countered the converging movement on Ermelo, had nevertheless seen French's columns sweeping unchecked across the high veld, and was fully aware of the searchings of heart which this great display of force had caused among his burghers. The reply, despatched the same day, but not received by Kitchener until the 22nd, was an acceptance. In the same letter Botha suggested Middelburg as a meeting-place, and requested a safe conduct to and from that place. Kitchener agreed, and February 28 was fixed for the conference.

Kitchener's policy.

Kitchener had no illusions as to the character of the struggle in which he was engaged. Even without the eloquent examples of history, events in South Africa since his accession to the command had shown the enormous capacity for resistance possessed by a pastoral race skilled in arms. He was conscious, too, that his mounted army was passing through a period of transition and for a time, at any rate, must inevitably decline in usefulness. The efforts of the Burgher Peace Committee having totally failed, there were two courses

open: to maintain an attitude of unbending reserve, and accept with philosophy the prospect of an incalculably long and costly struggle; or, should a favourable opportunity arise, to persuade the enemy, on the promise of certain terms from which independence was rigidly excluded, to abandon a ruinous and futile resistance. In the middle of February such an opportunity appeared to have arrived. De Wet and Steyn, the two most stubborn foes of British supremacy, were riding for their lives in Cape Colony. In the Transvaal French's great movement was throwing into panic the whole of a very important district. Kitchener, with the consent of the Home Government, resolved to seize the opportunity; and, while de Wet and Steyn were incapable of interference, to effect a settlement with Botha. In making this decision he was not in accord with Milner, whose attitude towards peace, as we foreshadowed at the end of Chapter III., was fundamentally different from Kitchener's. When he heard of the overtures, Milner happened to be on his way to Pretoria to assume the Governorship of the Transvaal. Although too late for the Conference, he at once joined loyally in the conduct of the negotiations, with the deep-rooted feeling, however, that they were premature and unwise.

The Generals meet, Feb. 28.

On February 28 Kitchener and Botha met at Middelburg. By a stroke of dramatic irony this was the very day on which de Wet and Steyn, after a period of desperate peril, crossed the Orange and won their freedom. It might have been read as a bad omen for peace.

Kitchener's draft terms.

In spite of the express condition laid down by Kitchener, and implicitly accepted in the letter of the Boer general, Botha began by asking that the Republics should retain some sort of independence. Kitchener having refused to discuss the point, a conference began upon the details of a possible settlement. At the end of the discussion, which was conducted in a very friendly and reasonable spirit, Botha took his departure, and the terms of a proposed settlement were thrown into the shape of a draft letter from the British to the Boer general. This letter was submitted to Milner, who met Kitchener at Bloemfontein, and was sent by

him for approval to the Home Government. It ran as follows :—

YOUR HONOUR,

With reference to our conversation at Middelburg on the 28th February, I beg to inform you that on the cessation of hostilities and the complete surrender of arms, ammunition, cannon, and other munitions of war now in the hands of the burghers in the field or in Government depôts or elsewhere, His Majesty's Government is prepared at once to grant an amnesty in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony for all *bonâ fide* acts of war committed during the recent hostilities ; as well as to move the Governments of Cape Colony and Natal to take similar action, but qualified by the disfranchisement of any British subjects implicated in the recent war. All prisoners of war now in St. Helena, Ceylon, or elsewhere will, on the completion of the surrender, be brought back to their country. At the same time military law will cease and be at once replaced by civil administration, which will at first consist of a Governor and a nominated Executive with or without an advisory elected Assembly, but it is the desire of His Majesty's Government, as soon as circumstances permit, to establish representative Government in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. Moreover on the cessation of hostilities a High Court will be established to administer the laws of the land, and this Court will be independent of the Executive.

Church property, public trusts, and orphan funds will be respected, and both the English and the Dutch languages will be used and taught in public schools and allowed in Courts of Law.

As regards the legal debts of the State, they will be paid, even if contracted during hostilities, to the extent to which the creditor can show to the satisfaction of a Commission or Judge that he has given value for his debt. The sum to be paid under this head will not, however, exceed £1,000,000, and if *bonâ fide* debts to a greater amount are proved they will have to be reduced proportionally to bring them within that figure.

I also beg to inform your Honour that it is the intention of His Majesty's Government to take steps to assist farmers who have suffered loss by the destruction of farms or the capture of stock during the war, and that no special tax will be imposed upon farmers to defray the expenses of the war. Where burghers require the protection afforded by fire-arms, such will be allowed

to be kept by licence and with due registration. Licences will be also issued for sporting rifles, guns, &c.

As regards the extension of the franchise to Kaffirs in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, it is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to give such a franchise before a representative Government is granted to those Colonies.

Amendments by the Government.

Broadly speaking, this document was confirmed by the Home Government. In some important particulars, however, modifications were made which require special comment.

Amnesty.

1st.—*Amnesty.*—The amnesty of *bonâ fide* belligerents was a matter of course. The amnesty of Colonial rebels presented great difficulties. Kitchener proposed to grant it qualified by disfranchisement. Milner objected, and was supported by Mr. Chamberlain. There can be no doubt that they were right. In the first place the Government had no power to bind Natal and Cape Colony in this respect. In the second place, though racial affinity greatly extenuated the crime of rebellion, specifically to name disfranchisement as the sole penalty savoured of weakness. It was better to let the law take its course, with the reminder to Botha that, by special enactment in the present war, the penalties for high treason had been much mitigated. The letter was altered in this sense.

Future Government.

2nd.—*Future Government.*—Kitchener's vague sketch of the future civil *régime* was replaced by the definite announcement that it would consist of a Governor and Executive Council, with a Legislative Council composed of a certain number of official members to whom a nominated unofficial element would from the first be added. The language with regard to representative government was rendered more cautious.

Debts of the State.

3rd.—*Debts of the State*—i.e., *Commandeering Receipts, &c.* —Kitchener's proposal to expend a million in paying *pro rata* "the legal debts of the State," whether contracted during hostilities or not, had been opposed in principle by Milner, and although sanctioned in principle by the Home Government, was considerably modified. Were such a wide field of liability allowed it was seen that it would be impossible to meet more than a fraction of the claims with a

million of money, or even to examine them effectively. At the instance of Mr. Chamberlain a distinction was drawn between debts contracted before and after annexation; both classes were to include only requisitions formally levied by commandants in the field, and, in the case of those levied after annexation, proof would have to be given that they had been exacted by *force majeure* and could not have been withheld.

Assistance to farmers.

4th.—*Assistance to Farmers.*—This question was closely allied to that just discussed. Botha, in view of the ravages wrought by the war, had pressed for some financial assistance to the farmers of the two colonies. Kitchener held out hopes of some such assistance, and in his draft letter spoke of the intention of the Government to grant it. Milner approved, but Mr. Chamberlain, fearing the effect that such liberality would have upon the loyalists, who also had suffered severely by the war, reduced the concession to a promise that the Government would "take into immediate consideration the possibility of assisting the occupants of farms *by loan*." Milner and Kitchener both objected to the alteration, on the ground that in many cases free assistance would be both right and politic, and that in the words "by loan" suspicious Boer eyes would detect an insidious design for getting the farmers into the clutches of the Government.

At this time there was some confusion of thought on the whole of the financial question. All agreed that a generous measure of help must be given to the Boer farmers, in order to enable them to start afresh. Nobody favoured a stingy policy. But a good deal hung on the way in which such help was given, whether as a matter of right or as a matter of free generosity. Mr. Chamberlain failed to see that in recognising State debts (even though "liability" was disclaimed) he conceded a point of principle which was much more important than free financial assistance. Milner, while against the recognition in any form of State debts, thought it unwise and inconsistent to refuse free assistance. In these negotiations, however, it would be a mistake to lay too much stress on the question. Relatively, it was not of much consequence.

The Kaffir question.

5th.—*The Kaffir Question.*—Mr. Chamberlain added a clear statement that the legal position of Kaffirs would be similar to that held by them in Cape Colony. Under the two Republics no equality had been permitted between white and coloured persons. Botha, in combating an improvement in their condition, had correctly voiced Boer opinion, but, as Mr. Chamberlain said, it was out of the question to purchase peace by compliance on such a point.

Precision infused by the Government.

Other amendments of less importance were made in the original text. All were conceived in a spirit of cautious precision, and the draft certainly needed revision in this sense. It was Kitchener's fault as a negotiator that, for the sake of winning momentary harmony, he was prone to use loose expressions which left real issues undetermined. He did not appreciate the fact that when a conqueror concedes terms any vagueness or ambiguity in the promises held out must at a later date be interpreted in favour of the conquered, unless the reconciliation is to be poisoned at its source by charges of meanness and bad faith. The statesman has to look far into the future and dares not raise a single hope which he cannot fulfil to the letter.

The amended letter sent to Botha, March 7.

Mr. Chamberlain's comments and amendments were received in Pretoria on March 6. On the 9th Milner telegraphed home that, while approving of most of the amendments, he regretted some, and especially the words "by loan" referred to above; that Lord Kitchener was opposed even more strongly than himself to this alteration, but that in both their judgments the difference of opinion did not warrant delay in sending the message. Meanwhile Kitchener's letter had been redrafted, and was sent to Botha on the 7th. In its final form it ran as follows *:—

PRETORIA, *March* 7, 1901.

YOUR HONOUR,

The letter.

With reference to our conversation at Middelburg on the 28th February, I have the honour to inform you that, in the event of a *general and complete* cessation of hostilities, and the surrender of all rifles, ammunition, cannon, and other munitions of war in the hands of the burghers, or in Government depôts, or

* Passages amended by the Government are shown in italics.

elsewhere, His Majesty's Government is prepared to adopt the following measures.

His Majesty's Government will at once grant an amnesty in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony for all *bonâ fide* acts of war committed during the recent hostilities. *British subjects belonging to Natal and Cape Colony, while they will not be compelled to return to those Colonies, will, if they do so, be liable to be dealt with by the laws of those Colonies specially passed to meet the circumstances arising out of the present war. As you are doubtless aware the special law in the Cape Colony has greatly mitigated the ordinary penalties for High Treason in the present case.*

All prisoners of war, now in St. Helena, Ceylon, or elsewhere, *being burghers or Colonists*, will, on the completion of the surrender, be brought back to their country *as quickly as arrangements can be made for their transport.*

At the earliest practicable date military administration will cease, and will be replaced by civil administration in the form of Crown Colony Government. There will, therefore, be, in the first instance, in each of the new Colonies, a Governor and an Executive Council, composed of the principal officials, with a Legislative Council consisting of a certain number of official members to whom a nominated unofficial element will be added. But it is the desire of His Majesty's Government, as soon as circumstances permit, *to introduce a representative element, and ultimately to concede to the new Colonies the privilege of self-government.* Moreover, on the cessation of hostilities a High Court will be established in each of the new Colonies to administer the laws of the land, and this Court will be independent of the Executive.

Church property, public trusts, and orphan funds will be respected.

Both the English and Dutch languages will be used and taught in public schools *when the parents of the children desire it*, and allowed in Courts of Law.

As regards the debts of the late Republican Governments, His Majesty's Government cannot undertake any liability. It is, however, prepared, as an act of grace, to set aside a sum not exceeding one million pounds sterling to repay inhabitants of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony for goods requisitioned from them by the late Republican Governments, or subsequent to annexation, by Commandants in the field being in a position to enforce such

requisitions. But such claims will have to be established to the satisfaction of a Judge or Judicial Commission, appointed by the Government, to investigate and assess them, and, if exceeding in the aggregate one million pounds, they will be liable to reduction pro rata.

I also beg to inform your Honour *that the new Government will take into immediate consideration the possibility of assisting by loan the occupants of farms, who will take the oath of allegiance, to repair any injuries sustained by* destruction of buildings or loss of stock during the war, and that no special war tax will be imposed upon farms to defray the expense of the war.

When burghers require the protection of fire-arms, such will be allowed to them by licence, and on due registration, *provided they take the oath of allegiance.* Licences will also be issued for sporting rifles, guns, &c., *but military fire-arms will only be allowed for purposes of protection.*

As regards the extension of the franchise to Kaffirs in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, it is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to give such franchise before representative Government is granted to those Colonies, *and if then given it will be so limited as to secure the just predominance of the white race. The legal position of coloured persons will, however, be similar to that which they hold in the Cape Colony.*

In conclusion, I must inform your Honour that, if the terms now offered are not accepted after a reasonable delay for consideration they must be regarded as cancelled.

I have, &c.,

KITCHENER, General,
Commander-in-Chief, British Forces, South Africa.

To his Honour Commandant-General LOUIS BOTHA.

Meanwhile prospects of peace have declined.

But in the meantime the prospects of peace had been declining. French, hampered by rain and scarcity, had for some time been at a complete standstill on the Swazi frontier, and the burghers behind him had had time to recover their spirits. Botha had consulted his Government and found it stubborn; he had corresponded with De la Rey and had met with no encouragement. Before the time came to reply, it was known that de Wet and Steyn had escaped capture, and

their opinion of the negotiations scarcely needed asking.* Nor would they have held themselves bound by any decision of the Transvaal. In a letter dated March 16 Botha, without giving any reasons, declined to go any further with the negotiations.

Botha refuses the terms, March 16.

Kitchener was always inclined to feel that with a little stronger support, especially on the question of amnesty, he might have obtained peace. However long the war lasted, it must, he held, eventually end in some such settlement as this. There was much truth in that; but the time had not yet come. His overtures were a bold but premature experiment. The Boer spirit—that new spirit born amidst the disasters of the previous year and matured in an offensive revival still quite recent—was far from being broken. Although exhaustion and despondency existed in some quarters, when it was put to the Boers in black and white that their cause was lost irretrievably and that it only remained to settle subordinate issues, the national will revolted. The conditions which favoured this revolt are conditions which it can never be easy for a highly civilised industrial nation fully to understand. The causes which bring such a nation to its knees were absent here. There were no vital industries to dislocate, no teeming population of peaceful workers to plunge into starvation. The people lived on the land, and though its fruits could be destroyed and the farms upon it gutted, the land could not be damaged. A year's crops were a relatively small matter, farm-buildings were of little value, and when a farm was once gutted it signified little whether it was rebuilt a year sooner or later. Meanwhile, the male population, in other words the army, was inured by habit and inherited instinct to a life of peril and adventure under the

The negotiation was premature.

* Botha wrote to de Wet and Steyn, asking them to come north and confer with him, but the letter arrived too late and the meeting did not take place till April. De Wet's secretary, however, went by train to Pretoria, only to find that negotiations had been broken off. He could have been of no use, for his master's temper, as shown by a circular to his burghers, was as unbending as ever. In this circular, which is dated April 1, he inveighs against various points in the proposed settlement, and asks finally, what is the use of examining it in detail, since nothing short of independence will induce the Boers to make peace.

stars. These men, moreover, were scattered over a vast expanse of territory under circumstances so varied as to render a common judgment unattainable. A few were suffering acutely; some were fighting with fair success; some were living in perfect safety and comfort. In short, there had never come to the Boers one of those moments of national agony which wring from a people a cry for peace.

Views of Botha.

As events fell out, Botha had effected a very useful *reconnaissance* in two directions. He had tested the sentiment of his burghers, made them familiar—and that was something—with the idea of negotiation; and he had found out on what lines an ultimate settlement was to be framed. We need not question his sincerity. Since only two months later he and his Government were urging submission on Steyn and de Wet, it is exceedingly unlikely that, as his friends in Europe openly boasted and his detractors everywhere threw in his teeth, he entered on the Middelburg conference with the sole object of investigating the strength or weakness of the British position. The instinctive passion for freedom which gave motive force to the Boer resistance was in him tempered by sane views as to the inevitable issue of the struggle. Nor had he the inborn love of guerilla warfare possessed by men like Christiaan de Wet. Having signally proved his capacity for higher military work, he was always impatient of the limitations this kind of warfare imposed. On the other hand, there was a side to his character, which, we may reasonably surmise, made his personal position very difficult. Commander-in-Chief by right of undoubted military merit, he nevertheless had not risen without effort. A keen ambitious purpose had helped him to gain the high position which he occupied. To crown its tenure by signing away independence as long as there remained the faintest hope of carrying his career to a triumphant military climax, was a hard step to take. He knew very well that it was impossible to recover the lost territories with the forces at his disposal, but there always remained the chance of a general rising in Cape Colony. The chimera of foreign intervention still survived, as did the dim hope that pro-Boer sentiment in Great Britain would grow

and triumph. Meanwhile he could salve his conscience with the knowledge that the British policy of concentration camps freed him from responsibility for the women and children, whose misery was the most cogent argument for submission. There was little to lose; there was much to gain. For Botha had the shrewd perception that, whatever the ultimate issue, the Boers could fare no worse than they would fare under the proposed settlement. His mental attitude is revealed clearly in a letter addressed to his burghers on March 15. "Virtually," he writes, "Lord Kitchener's letter contains nothing more, but rather less than what the British Government will be obliged to do should our cause go wrong." He goes on to make a perfunctory protest against certain provisions, but it is abundantly clear that the real objection is fundamental. "The cause is not yet lost," he writes, "and since nothing worse than this can befall us, it is well worth while to fight on." And, again, "The spirit of Lord Kitchener's letter makes it very plain to you that the British Government desires nothing less than the destruction of our Afrikander people." The writer ends with a warm exhortation to his followers to put their trust in God alone. "Who in His own time and in His own way will surely send deliverance."

Conclusion.

Such were the abortive negotiations of 1901. Their failure caused much disappointment in England. On public platforms and in Parliament the Government was bitterly attacked by a section of the Opposition for having thrown away the chances of peace by attempting to exact too much, and the differences of opinion, frankly set forth in the despatches, between Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Milner and Lord Kitchener, were used to further the argument. We have endeavoured to show how shallow was this view, which, indeed, was never widely held. The nation at large instinctively grasped the truth, and resigned itself with unflinching determination to a further struggle of indefinite length and severity.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NORTHERN ADVANCE AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST VILJOEN

(March–May 1901)

I

The Advance to Pietersburg

The lull, mid-March.

No sort of armistice had accompanied the negotiations, and the temporary lull coinciding with them was soon broken.

Although defined epochs are difficult to trace in the history of the guerilla war, in a certain sense this lull in the latter half of March 1901 does mark an epoch. At length, over the whole theatre of war, Kitchener had gained the initiative. Ever since his accession to the command, he had been coping with a formidable recrudescence of the war, in which his own measures had been dictated by the enemy's bold offensive. Now there was a change. De Wet, for some time to come, was incapable of further efforts. Botha's brave words to his burghers were not followed by action. De la Rey bided his time. Only down in the far south Kritzinger's forays in Cape Colony showed that de Wet's expulsion had by no means ended the trouble in that quarter.

Kitchener's next plan.

At this moment the moral effect of a vigorous counter-attack at all points would have been enormous. But this was not feasible. As it was pointed out in the last chapter, the dynamic force behind Kitchener's overtures was not great. There was a fleeting and shadowy opportunity, and this had passed. With his seasoned mounted troops dwindling every day, and only untrained levies to redress the balance, Kitchener was acting under strict limitations.

Map, p. 216.

But the direction of his next effort was wisely chosen. In the Transvaal there still remained a vast area that as yet had never been penetrated by British troops. We refer to the north and north-east. Pietersburg and three-quarters of the railway leading to it were still in Boer hands. In the Lydenburg district Viljoen and the Transvaal Government had for long been undisturbed. Kitchener used his first breathing-space for the purpose of seizing the northern capital and railway, and of striking vigorously at Viljoen. The season was an additional argument for this course. Winter was fast approaching, and there was a fear that the burghers of the high-veld, just overrun by French, might migrate, according to their normal custom, from their cold and parched plateaus to the warmer and more hospitable regions north of the Delagoa railway, and there recuperate in peace. In the meantime the high veld and the south-east, as soon as the last of French's operations were at an end, were deserted by British troops. In the Western Transvaal, however, Methuen, Babington and other leaders carried on the campaign against De la Rey, with what success we shall see. In the Free State, whither Kitchener sent most of the raw troops as they arrived in succession from abroad, the war languished.

Historical arrangement.

A word needs to be said here concerning historical arrangement. The campaign in the north-east, to be described in the present chapter, will bring us up to the end of April. In the next chapter we purpose to carry events in the Western Transvaal, Free State, and Cape Colony up to the same point. Then we shall pause to take a general view, retrospective and prospective, of the conditions and methods of the war. While it is true, for the reasons already stated, that March marks an epoch, the end of April and the beginning of May form, from the broadest historical standpoint, a dividing-line still more strongly marked, and for three reasons. In the first place, the advance to Pietersburg, though it was made the basis for a series of fresh operations, was in itself only the culminating episode of a process begun far back, the acquisition, namely, of the main lines of communication in the two republics. In the second place, the parching cold of the South African winter, beginning

in earnest at the end of April, impaired the mobility of the Boers and changed the conditions of the war; and in the third place, it was approximately at the same period that the extensive changes now going on in the *personnel* of the British mounted troops were at last completed, and Kitchener faced the enemy with his new mounted army.

Pietersburg and the Northern Railway.

In the previous chapters allusion has often been made to the importance of Pietersburg, of the railway connecting it with Pretoria, and of the regions surrounding it.* It was here, we may remind the reader, that, after the *débâcle* of Komati Poort in September 1900, the Boer Governments and a considerable number of the stoutest burghers fled for refuge, and it was from here that the principal impulse came for the revival of the war. As a result of the councils held in the north, Beyers and Kemp had marched south to unite with De la Rey at Nooitgedacht, Botha had put on a war-footing the commandos of the high-veld, Viljoen had reorganised those of the north-east, and President Steyn had communicated to de Wet the first scheme for the invasion of Cape Colony. Now that these measures had taken effect, the value of Pietersburg and the railway had diminished considerably. In the guerilla war the Boer resistance did not depend in the least on towns and railways, and these last relics of former greatness were rather subjects for sentimental pride than possessions whose loss would hasten the end materially.

Its present importance.

At the same time there were imperative reasons for depriving the Boers of this their last orthodox base. Pietersburg was still a source of supplies, particularly for the two northern commandos (Zoutpansberg and Waterberg), which, under Beyers, had slipped through French's fingers and returned to their own district,† and in a lesser degree for more distant forces. Four large steam mills were constantly at work grinding mealies and wheat; salt, from the neighbouring salt pans, and other provisions were distributed in large quantities; ammunition was manufactured; depôts of cattle and horses were maintained, and a newspaper was regularly published. The town, moreover, though not the seat of

* See chap. ii., pp. 44, 45, and 60; and chap. iv., p. 97.

† See chap. vi., p. 163, footnote.

Government, was to some extent an administrative centre. The Transvaal Government itself, as we saw in Chapter IV., was established eighty miles to the south at a lonely farm in the Tautesberg; and here we are led to the second and perhaps the most cogent reason for the occupation of Pietersburg and the Northern Railway. It was a preliminary step to operations in the north-eastern Transvaal.

Description of the north-eastern Transvaal.

The vast region, partly bush, partly mountain, whose boundaries are the Zoutpansberg on the north, the Delagoa railway on the south, the Northern railway on the west, and the Drakensberg, prolonged by the mountainous district round Lydenburg, on the east, was in undisturbed possession of the enemy. On the southern skirts, British troops held the Delagoa railway, the Pietersburg railway as far only as Pienaar's River and the line of fortified posts, under General Walter Kitchener, from Machadodorp to Lydenburg. Inside this shallow arc, and north of it, nothing was held. Much, indeed, was not worth holding. Most of the country lying west of the Olifant's River which, it will be observed, cuts the whole region roughly into two, consists of bush-veld, that is to say, of wildernesses of mimosa thorn and dwarf trees, interspersed with patches of open arable land and rank grass, but poorly watered, teeming with the germs of fever and horse-sickness, and very sparsely inhabited. The summer is the most unhealthy season both for man and beast. In winter, from May to September, the climate is less dangerous, but the scarcity of water is aggravated. The west and north-west parts are the least habitable. Only on their very fringe, at the villages along the railway and especially at Warmbaths, were any commandos wont to congregate. The south-west angle, containing ranges of low hills intersected by the Elands, Kameel, Moos and Wilge Rivers, is a good deal more open and healthy, and always sheltered several small commandos. But the most valuable region for the Boers was that lying east of the Olifant's River, and especially the mountainous Lydenburg district, containing the Bothasberg, the Tautesberg and the Steenkampsberg. This country has a healthy climate, and though wild enough and very difficult of access, contains some rich

and well-watered valleys and some excellent grazing. In the recesses of the hills were hollows and glens innumerable, which afforded admirable shelter to the guerilla bands. Here, with his headquarters at Windhoek, Ben Viljoen controlled the commandos of the north-east, and here, at the farm Paardeplaats, upon the summit of the Tautesberg, guarded by a small detachment of Pretoria Mounted Rifles, lay ensconced the Transvaal Government.*

The Transvaal Government.

A good deal of satirical mockery was poured out upon this fugitive Government, but in fact, like the Free State Government, it was far from being contemptible. It was in constant communication with the Commandant-General and the various commandos, and in occasional correspondence even with Europe. It had branch offices at Roos Senekal, 15 miles to the south-east, and at Pietersburg, and it carried on, strange as it may seem, a good deal of regular executive business, including the appointment of *landdrosts* and the issue of paper money. It even found occupation for a Postmaster-General, charged with the duty of maintaining a regular postal service with Pietersburg. In January the Vice-President and two other members had travelled west and made a tour of the railway line from Warmbaths to Pietersburg, and at the latter town signalised their visit by the dismissal of all British inhabitants. In March the Government had taken an indirect but important share in the peace negotiations. In short, it was and remained a living force, and its capture was one of the prime objects of Kitchener's scheme of operations against the north-east.

Viljoen's recent doings, Jan–March.

Viljoen's only important success had been the capture of Helvetia at the end of December 1900. Early in January 1901 we saw him cooperating with Botha in the simultaneous attacks upon the garrisons of the Delagoa railway. Since then he had never taken the offensive in force, but pin-pricks innumerable had been delivered by his men, chiefly in the shape of damage to the railway. Jack Hindon and Karl

* The *personnel* was as follows: Mr. Schalk Burger, Acting-President; Mr. Reitz, State Secretary; Mr. Louis Jacobsz, State Attorney; General Lukas Meyer, Member of the Executive Council; Mr. P. de Villiers, Acting Treasurer-General; Mr. Brugman, Acting Auditor-General; Mr. D. Van Velden, Secretary.

Trichardt were his most active and skilful lieutenants in this petty but exasperating branch of guerilla warfare. During the months of January, February and March, in spite of a steady improvement in the defences of this as of all other railways, the line between Machadodorp and Pretoria was blown up on twelve occasions, and in most cases trains were derailed and partially destroyed. On one occasion a train carrying Kitchener narrowly escaped destruction. Of attacks on fortified posts in the same period there were only four; all faint-hearted attempts and easily repulsed. In the middle of February, Botha had sent a strong appeal to Viljoen to make some diversion to relieve the pressure caused by French, but the result was only a mild and bloodless demonstration against Belfast. On the other hand, no serious effort on the British side was made to molest Viljoen. One expedition was undertaken by General Walter Kitchener in the second week of February, but it never had a chance of success, and it proved wholly abortive.* The only other enterprise worth recording occurred in the middle of March. On the 15th of that month Colonel Park, operating from Lydenburg, attacked and captured a small laager at Kruger's Post, twelve miles to the north, taking 35 prisoners.

Kitchener's scheme for dealing with the north and north-east.

We may now pass to Kitchener's scheme. The first step was to cut deep into the rear and occupy Pietersburg, thus breaking up the Boer base in the north and converting it into a British base for operations to the south. The next step was to send down troops to block the drifts across the Olifant's River. A glance at the map will show this great stream flowing northward through the bush-veld until it reaches the Strydpoort hills. Here it is deflected sharply to the east, and after passing between the Strydpoort and Lulu ranges pierces the Drakensberg and so gains the low country. Its upper waters, therefore, form the western and northern sides of a rough oblong whose southern and eastern sides respectively are the Delagoa railway from Middelburg to

Map, p. 216.

* Three columns (1,800 rifles and 9 guns) from Belfast, Machadodorp and Lydenburg, converged on Windhoek, Viljoen's headquarters. They were forced to retire on February 12 with fifteen casualties.

Machadodorp and the line of fortified posts from Machadodorp to Lydenburg. It was within this oblong that the main operations were to take place in the shape of a concerted advance of six columns which were to start from various points on the southern and eastern sides and to move north and west. The primary object of these columns was to surround and capture Viljoen's forces; but, should Viljoen's burghers break out to the west, the troops sent down from Pietersburg to hold the line of the Olifant's were intended to form an exterior line of resistance, blocking escape to the bush-veld. The direction of these six columns was entrusted to Lieut.-General Sir Bindon Blood, who, early in April, succeeded Brig.-General J. C. Barker in the command of all the troops on the eastern line of communications. He had been summoned from India to take this post and had brought with him a high reputation for skill in frontier warfare, a reputation he was now asked to justify against the guerillas of South Africa.

Sir Bindon Blood.

Plumer and his column.

For the preliminary dash upon Pietersburg, Kitchener selected Brigadier-General Plumer. No better choice could have been made; for the enterprise required nerve and energy, qualities in which Plumer excelled, and of which he had given conspicuous proof in the great de Wet hunt. As we saw at the end of Chapter V., he and his tireless column had been the last to leave the scent, abandoning pursuit only on March 10 at Brandfort, when it was clear that success was hopeless. Thence, in a spasmodic effort to regain touch, they were sent to Winburg, and on the 22nd, in response to sudden orders from headquarters, they were in Pretoria preparing for the new campaign. The column, it will be remembered, was a mounted one, and was made up almost entirely of Australasians, divided into two corps, under Colonels Jeffreys and Cradock. Its composition remained unaltered,* save that a small detachment of Yeomanry was withdrawn, 4 guns of the 18th Battery replaced 4 guns of the 7th and 85th Batteries, and 200 New Zealanders of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd contingents, whose term of service had expired, were relieved by the 6th contingent, nearly 600 strong,

* See chap. v., p. 137, footnote.

Brigadier-General H. C. O. Plumer, C.B., A.D.C.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.

newly arrived from the same colony. Another small reinforcement came from a detachment of the Bushveld Carbineers, a new corps raised by a well-wisher named Levi, the proprietor of an hotel at Pienaar's River. Colonel Cradock, it must be added, fell ill at Pretoria, and was succeeded in the command of his corps by Major Colvin. The total strength was 1,300 mounted rifles, 8 field guns and a pom-pom, together with a small detachment of Engineers. This fighting force was what the occasion demanded; compact, mobile, and composed mainly of troops skilled in bushcraft. For garrison work on the line a considerable force of infantry was collected at Pretoria.

Plumer starts north, March 26.

Plumer started on March 26 and marched north, following the railway. Pains had been taken to keep his destination a profound secret, and with a great measure of success. At any rate the Boer leaders took no concerted action to arrest the advance. Beyers alone, with the two northern commandos, was in a position to check Plumer; but these commandos were scattered over a wide extent of country, and the speed of Plumer's movements paralysed such resistance as Beyers might wish to offer. Though he managed to gather a small force at Warmbaths, he neither showed fight nor took any ordinary military precaution to delay the advance.

The march to Pietersburg, first phase, March 26–Apr. 5.

The progress of the march was as follows. Pienaar's River Station, 40 miles from Pretoria, was reached on the 28th, and the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, who had formed the garrison there since November 1900, were gathered up and added to the force, together with a section of pom-poms. On the 29th and 30th, using the railway for the carriage of his transport and guns, and leaving strong escorts of infantry to accompany the trains, Plumer pushed on to Warmbaths over heavy sandy roads that would have been almost impassable for wheeled traffic. On the evening of the 30th, under a little harmless sniping from Boer fugitives, Major Vialls and an advanced party of Australians occupied Buis Kop, a range of hills a little beyond the town. On the 31st, four companies of the Northamptonshire Regiment having been left to garrison Warmbaths, the main body

followed, and on April 1 Nylstroom was occupied.* At this point both road and railway turn abruptly to the north-east, still running through thick bush. At Piet Potgietersrust they penetrate the valley which separates the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg, and thence, circling round the Strydpoort range, strike up over the open plateau where Pietersburg stands. Heavy rain caused a day's delay at Nylstroom; on April 3 Plumer reached Naboom Spruit Station; on the 4th, threading the foothills of the Waterberg, he encamped at Moord Drift on the Great Nyl River, and on the 5th, without firing a shot, he occupied Piet Potgietersrust. This little town was founded by Piet Potgieter in the middle of the last century as a rallying point for the *voortrekkers* against the attacks of the Kaffir tribes, who, at Moord Drift, had carried out a terrible massacre of women and children.

Second phase, Apr. 6–8.

Here, as at Nylstroom, a few surrenders were received and the bulk of the force halted for a day, while supply trains and construction trains came up from the rear and a reconnaissance was made to the front. Information went to show that Beyers, who had steadily retired before the British advance, would make a stand at the De Berg Pass, 13 miles to the north-east, on the road to Pietersburg. The rumour was groundless, for Colvin's corps, which was sent out to reconnoitre, found the pass defended only by eighty Boers, and occupied it at 5.30 P.M. on the 6th. Leaving the Gordon Highlanders to garrison the town, Plumer resumed the general advance on the 7th. Rising steadily towards the De Berg Pass the road at last frees itself from the dense thorn and issues upon an open and beautiful country. Twenty-seven miles were covered on this day, and the force encamped at Marabastad, eight miles from Pietersburg. The only real obstruction offered was on the railway, where a bridge was found damaged, and several mines were exploded under a construction train. Repairs, however, were quickly made; and at the scene of the first explosion a dozen Boers were captured by the Bushveld Carbineers.

* This little town marked the farthest limit of the British advance in August 1900, when it had been occupied for a few days by Plumer himself; beyond it the country had never yet been traversed by British troops.

The work on the railway.

This is a convenient place in which to record the excellent work done on the railway by the small detachment of Sappers, under Lieut. Vickers, R.E., and by the railway staff at Headquarters, under Captain Leggett. The line was in bad repair, water was very scarce, and running by night was impossible. In spite of these difficulties, a supply train and two construction trains kept level with the main advance from Pienaar's River to Pietersburg; Boer inhabitants were sent back in large batches to Pretoria, and reinforcements and supplies were transported down the line without a break.

Pietersburg occupied, Apr. 8.

On the morning of the 8th the short final stage was covered and Pietersburg quietly occupied.* Plumer had reached his goal in a fortnight, practically without opposition, and with scarcely any loss. On the night before his arrival, Beyers, with 500 men and a Long Tom, had evacuated the place, removing a quantity of stores but leaving much undestroyed. Two engines and 36 trucks were found standing at the terminus. There also fell into British hands a 7-pounder Krupp gun with 1,000 shells and a great quantity of small-arm ammunition, gunpowder and dynamite. Plumer destroyed four steam mills, a repairing shop and the plant of two local newspapers, but not before an English edition of one of them, the *Zoutpansberg Wachter*, had been edited and printed by some enterprising young officers. Only 46 burghers surrendered; most of the male inhabitants having ridden off from their little Moscow to join Beyers in the veld, and under his leading to begin a local guerilla campaign.

Plumer at Pietersburg, Apr. 8–14.

Plumer stayed five clear days at Pietersburg while the necessary steps were taken to make good the ground won. The Gordon Highlanders, under Lieut.-Col. Scott, were brought up to garrison the town, and the Wiltshire Regiment and the 12th Mounted Infantry were sent from Pretoria to aid the Northamptons in holding posts along the lines of

* A painful incident marred what was otherwise a peaceful consummation. An advance-guard of Tasmanians, led by Captain Sale, pushed through the town towards a hill beyond it, and in doing so were fired on by a single Boer concealed only thirty paces away in the long grass which bordered the road. Before he could be run to earth, this individual (who turned out to be a Pietersburg schoolmaster) had killed Captain Sale, Lieutenant Walker, and a trooper.

communication. Lieut.-Colonel Hall, R.A., was placed in command of the whole line from Pienaar's River to Pietersburg. These measures set the mobile column free to engage in the second phase of the operations. But the troops had not been idle. On the 10th Jeffreys's corps had reconnoitred to the south, and from the 9th to the 11th other mounted troops had scoured the country in a vain search for the Boer Long Tom, which was reported to have been abandoned on the road to Haenertsburg. Its days, however, were numbered.

II

The Operations against Viljoen

Plumer blocks drifts over the Olifant's River, Apr. 14–22.

Plumer's instructions now were to march south and occupy drifts on the Olifant's River, so as to close these avenues of escape to the burghers who might evade the grip of Blood's enveloping movement. On the 14th he marched out of Pietersburg, and on the same evening Colvin's corps, pushing ahead without transport, occupied Chune's Poort, a pass at the summit of the precipitous Strydpoort range, where sheer granite cliffs rise above the road, and a gorge, only 50 feet wide at its narrowest point, has to be traversed. This Thermopylæ was undefended, and on the 15th the force dropped down into the warm sandy valley of the Olifant's and encamped close to M'Phatlele's Kaffir location. Here, on the 16th, Plumer divided his force, sending Jeffreys's corps east to Blaauwbloemjeskloof Drift, and Colvin's corps south to Bathfontein Drift where the headquarters were established. Acting from these two points, the two corps proceeded to patrol the river and plant small guards to watch the various fords. These were far more numerous than had been supposed. Thirteen drifts passable for men and cattle were found to exist between Port Scheiding on the north and Commissie Drift on the south, a distance of fifty miles. Commissie Drift itself was occupied, but only on the 22nd, by Major Vialls and a party of New Zealanders.

Strategical scheme for Blood's column.

Leaving Plumer with his troops thus disposed, we now turn to the formation and disposition of Sir Bindon Blood's

force. Blood arrived at Middelburg on April 7, and a week of great activity followed in which the six columns were collected and concentrated at the three pre-arranged points of departure, Middelburg, Belfast and Lydenburg. The scheme of operations, like all the great schemes of the guerilla war, was mapped out at Headquarters on expert advice collected by the Intelligence Department, and was then handed over to Blood for execution. The principal expert in this case was Colonel Woolls-Sampson of the Imperial Light Horse, whose extensive knowledge of the country and the native dialects made him invaluable as an intelligence officer, and who, in that capacity, was destined to accompany Blood. On paper the scheme was sound, just as the scheme devised to surround Botha at Ermelo was sound. Viljoen was known to be somewhere about Roos Senekal in the Steelpoort valley, and the configuration of the mountains was such that, if threatened with envelopment, he had but two easy lines of retreat. The Steelpoort valley itself, running north and south, was one, and the Blood River valley, running east and west between the Tautesberg and the Bothasberg was the other. In order to surround Viljoen and close these outlets, the following movements were ordered. Pulteney's cavalry column,* brought up from Vryheid, where it had been operating under French, was to start from Belfast and march north on Roos Senekal, by way of Dullstroom. On Pulteney's left Lieut.-Col. G. E. Benson, R.A.,† was to march north-east from Middelburg, cross the Bothasberg, and watch the southern exit of the Steelpoort Valley. Benson and Pulteney were placed under the general control of Major-Gen. Fetherstonhaugh, who, having recovered from the wound received at Belmont in November 1899, was now once more at the front. On Benson's left a column, formed at Middelburg under

Composition and functions of the southern columns.

* *Pulteney's column :—*
1st Royal Dragoons, 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, 1st Bn. Scots Guards, "T" Batt. R.H.A., 1 pom-pom, 1 5-in. howitzer.

† *Benson's column :—*
2nd Scottish Horse, 18th and 19th Bns. M.I., 4 Cos. 1st Bn. Argyll and Sutherland Highrs., 2 guns 21st Batt. R.F.A., 2 guns 81st Batt. R.F.A., 1 12-pdr. q.-f., 1 5-in. howitzer.

Major-Gen. S. Beatson,* was to advance due north, and in the first instance to seize and garrison two drifts on the Olifant's River; de Wagen Drift and Crocodile Drift. In so doing Beatson was performing functions similar and supplementary to those of Plumer farther to the north —completing, that is to say, the exterior line of resistance. With the rest of his force he was to operate in the angle between the Blood and Olifant's Rivers, but without any explicit instructions to close the Blood River valley.

The eastern columns.

Such were the columns destined to operate from the south. Three more were to start from the east. Lieut.-Col. Douglas,† marching from Witklip, a little south of Lydenburg, was to penetrate the Steenkampsberg and, in co-operation with Pulteney, move on Dullstroom. The other two columns, under Major-Gen. Walter Kitchener‡ and Colonel Park,§ were to leave Lydenburg and strike out to the north-west. Park was to halt in the neighbourhood of Rietfontein, where he could watch the northern exits of the Steelpoort valley and the parallel valley of the Dwars River; W. Kitchener was to march on over the Magnet Heights to Fort Weber; thence, wheeling to the south, he was intended to block the Blood River valley. Since he had considerably the longest march to make and one of the most important duties to perform, it was unfortunate that, of all the columns, his was the least mobile. He had three excellent battalions of infantry, but only 350 mounted men. Such was the general plan; but the strategical object does not seem to have been

* *Beatson's column* :—
Victorian M.I., 1,050; 1st Bn. R. Munster Fusiliers, 600; 4 Cos. 1st Bn. Argyll and Sutherland Highrs., 1 Elswick gun, 1 pom-pom, 2 guns 9th Batt. R.F.A.

† *Douglas's column* :—
2½ sq. 19th Hussars, 1 sq. 18th Hussars, 1st Bn. Royal Scots, 1 Co. W. Yorkshire Regt., 2 guns 42nd Batt. R.F.A., 1 pom-pom.

‡ *Walter Kitchener's column* :—
Manchester Regt. M.I., West Australian M.I., 1st Bn. Devonshire Regt., 2nd Bn. Rifle Brigade, 2nd Bn. Seaforths, 2 guns 53rd Batt. R.F.A., 1 5-in. gun, 1 12-pdr. q.-f., 1 5-in. howitzer.

§ *Park's column* :—
Leicester Regt. M.I., 4th Div. M.I., 1st Bn. Gordon Highrs., 1st Bn. R. Irish Regt., 2 guns 53rd Batt. R.F.A., 1 pom-pom S section.

communicated with any precision to the various leaders, all of whom appear to have been under the impression that their main duty was that of clearing the country.

In round numbers Blood had under his hand 11,000 rifles and 31 guns. The force was cumbrous. Infantry largely predominated in the three eastern columns; in the three southern columns mounted men were in a slight majority; but many were raw and inexperienced. Benson's Scottish Horse and Mounted Infantry were entirely new to South Africa, and some companies of the latter had had only a few days' training in England before sailing. Beatson's Victorians were untried troops, and were mounted, moreover, on horses just released from shipboard. All the columns were needlessly strong in artillery. Howitzers and 5-inch guns, together with an immense mass of transport, rumbled over the veld. In short, the force closely resembled that which French had led against Botha. And the methods adopted were the same. It was said at the end of Chapter VI. that the sweep through the Eastern Transvaal set a bad tradition, and this tradition was now followed. The two aims of clearing the country and defeating the enemy were again confused in such a way as to rob the movement of all aggressive impulse. For the former object the force and its methods were well adapted. Like the high veld, the country had never been overrun; farms were being peacefully tilled; there were mills and food-depôts to be destroyed and stock to be captured; the burghers had never been subjected to a supreme test of discipline, and though there was a nucleus of stalwart fighters, there was also a fringe of faint-hearted adherents who needed only an excuse for surrender. For the latter and paramount object success was again made to hang on the punctual co-operation of slow-moving forces over a very wide extent of wild and little-known country. It will be seen from the course of these operations, a good deal more clearly than French's drive disclosed, that there was no insuperable antagonism between the two aims. With a clear distinction drawn between them, it was not impossible to accomplish both. But for this purpose it was essential to give some measure of independence to the striking portion of

A cumbrous force.

The double aim.

the force, namely, the mounted troops, and to imbue this arm with the idea that its primary function was to defeat the enemy. As to the second line of resistance, the guarded drifts on the Olifant's, it was useless to expect too much of a thin cordon of troops strung over a hundred miles of river.

The Transvaal Government escapes, Apr. 5–6.

The movement was timed to begin on April 14, the day on which Plumer had left Pietersburg. But well before the appointed date the Boers within the threatened area had taken alarm. News of Plumer's raid had reached them, and the process of massing Blood's troops was one that it was impossible to keep secret. As early as April 5 the Transvaal Government left its eyrie on the Tautesberg and, guarded by several hundred mounted burghers, trekked south. Crossing the railway undiscovered near Pan Station on the night of the 6th, the party continued its journey without any untoward adventures, and on the 9th joined Louis Botha near Ermelo. Thus, before a shot had been fired, one of the two most valuable prizes within the area had eluded the British grasp. Other small bands followed this example,

Viljoen remains.

but Viljoen himself made no move. When danger was first scented, he ordered a concentration of his scattered commandos, and, at the time when the British movement began, he had managed to collect about 1,100 men between Roos Senekal and Dullstroom—approximately, at the central point upon which the British lines of advance were focussed.

Movements of the southern columns, Apr. 15–19.

Congestion on the single line of railway interfered considerably with the smoothness of Blood's movements. To make matters worse, the Boer train-wreckers were busy to the last instant, and on the 11th and 12th blew up trains near Witbank and Machadodorp. The three eastern columns marched punctually on the 14th, but of the southern columns Beatson was delayed till the 15th, Benson and Pulteney for a day longer. To begin with the westernmost, Beatson left Middelburg at midday on the 15th, and, skirting the main Bothasberg range, plunged into the hilly country behind it, with small parties of Boers snapping perpetually at his flanks. On the 18th he was at Roodepoort farm, seven miles from de Wagen Drift, and on the 19th he proceeded to carry out the first part of his orders. Three hundred

Munster Fusiliers, a gun of the 9th Battery, and thirty Victorians were despatched to Crocodile Drift with provisions for a fortnight, and a similar force was left at Roodepoort to guard the approach to de Wagen Drift. These measures, though they carried out the letter of the instructions given to Beatson, were scarcely sufficient; for, as Plumer had found in his section, the river was practicable at many places not dignified with the name of drift. With his Victorian Mounted Rifles Beatson proceeded to clear the country. He had no intelligence officer, rather vague instructions, and was quite unaware that he was within fifteen miles of an important strategical point, the head of the Blood River valley. In the meantime Benson's column, accompanied by Sir Bindon Blood and his staff, was working slowly into line on Beatson's right. Owing to a series of irritating delays, due to the congestion on the railway, the column had covered but twenty-six miles in four days, and on the evening of the 19th was at Klipspruit, in the Bothasberg, eighteen miles south-east of Beatson.

Pulteney and Douglas, Apr. 14–19.

Pulteney and Douglas, it will be remembered, had been ordered to converge simultaneously on Dullstroom. Since Pulteney was two days late in starting, this co-operation did not take place. Douglas, however, marched from Witklip punctually on the 14th, and at Zwagershoek Pass climbed the Steenkampsberg. It was on the 16th, when he was approaching Dullstroom by a difficult mountain-road, that Viljoen, who was fully informed of the delay which had befallen Pulteney and knew that he risked nothing by leaving Dullstroom behind him, made his first move in the shape of a sharp attack on Douglas at Palmietfontein. Müller, with 400 men, worked round and pressed upon the rearguard. Viljoen, with another 500, attacked from the heights on the right, and Taute, with 200 Lydenburgers, from the heights on the left. Douglas, in a spirited action, repulsed the enemy at every point, and forced his way to Dullstroom. The result of the encounter was that Taute slipped away to the south-east, and for the nonce disappeared, and that Viljoen, with the rest of the Boer force, fell back to the west, and in a state of great

Action of Palmietfontein, Apr. 16.

discouragement and uneasiness took post on a plateau known as Mapoch's Gronden. It does not appear that there was anything to prevent him from following the example of Taute and riding out from the British circle; but he was not yet resigned to the loss of his guns and his large laager. Müller, his right-hand man, had been wounded in the action, and this, no doubt, was an additional cause of vacillation. Douglas remained at Dullstroom, seventeen miles from Mapoch's Gronden, and Pulteney, who reached the town on the 17th, was pushed forward on the 19th to Windhoek, only nine miles from Viljoen's laager.

Park and W. Kitchener on the north, Apr. 14–21.

On the north, Park and W. Kitchener, marching from Lydenburg, had met with no opposition. The former had been left at Rietfontein, where he was watching the valleys and clearing farms. W. Kitchener marched on through Secokuniland and over the Magnet Heights to Fort Weber, where he exchanged heliograms with Plumer's pickets on the Olifant's. But it was now the 20th; he had made one needless delay in sending back for supplies, and he was still far from the scene of decisive action. It was only on the 21st that the column wheeled to the left and marched south towards the Blood River.

Viljoen's movements, Apr. 16–20.

It is the peculiar interest of these operations, as compared with those of French, that Viljoen, up to the last possible moment, played into the hands of his enemies. Since the beginning of the month he had been aware of what was coming. Disaffection was rife in his ranks; men were skulking away in twos and threes, and he was threatened even with wholesale desertions. Yet it was not till the 16th, at Palmietfontein, that he made his first sally; and between the 16th and 19th he did nothing at all. He was still reluctant to fly, for flight meant the abandonment not only of guns, which mattered little, but of all material comforts, and he and his men had lived too long in safe quarters to view with any zest a return to nomadic life. But on the 19th he realised that he must be moving. Beatson, Benson, Pulteney and Douglas were crowding slowly in from the west, south and east. As to the north, apart from the presence of Park and Kitchener, whom he knew to be still

far away, he had made up his mind that, in view of the fierce hostility of the Secokuni Kaffirs, retreat in that direction was inadvisable. On the 19th, therefore, he accepted the inevitable, burnt all his wagons and carts, destroyed his two remaining guns and gave orders for his force to march at nightfall. On receiving these orders, a hundred Boksburgers deserted, leaving him with only 800 men. His scouts had reported that the best hope of escape lay in a dash to the south, between Benson and Pulteney. There was indeed a yawning gap here; for Benson at Klipspruit and Pulteney at Windhoek were eighteen miles apart. But in following the course of the Steelpoort River Viljoen took a line which brought him close to Benson. The scouts riding ahead in the darkness reported the presence of British outposts, and at the bare thought of fighting Viljoen's resolution failed him. He could not trust his burghers. In any case a fight meant delay, and it was desirable that the railway, distant more than thirty miles from the point of departure, should be crossed before daylight. In no mood to emulate Botha's tactics at Lake Chrissie, Viljoen beat a retreat and at sunrise on the 20th was back at the old camping-ground among the smouldering ruins of his wagons. The tired burghers grumbled, and many were on the verge of mutiny; but he kept the upper hand, and, as soon as darkness fell, led them out once more, this time to the westward. Admirably served by his scouts, he knew that the Blood River valley was still open, and he decided to use this last outlet, and so to gain the Olifant's. Fully aware that the drifts there were guarded, he feared this danger less than the blockhouses on the railway.

The situation on the 20th April.

On this critical day, the 20th, Beatson moved eight miles east to Leeuwfontein, and Benson eight miles north to Blinkwater. These were the only movements. With Pulteney at Windhoek and Douglas at Dullstroom, there were thus four columns ranged at wide intervals on an east and west line thirty-five miles in length, and at a maximum distance of thirty miles from the railway. Two were within eight miles and two within eighteen miles of Viljoen. In these columns there were more than 3,000 mounted men, most of

whom, if we allow a very moderate radius for the action of this arm, had been for the last three days, and all were now, within striking distance of Viljoen. But for strictly military purposes they had been of little more use than infantry. There had been no reconnaissance. All the surplus energy of the cavalry and mounted infantry was thrown into the raiding of farms and cattle, work which might very well have waited until the strategical object was attained. In default of any touch with the Boer main body, the only intelligence of its movements came from Woolls-Sampson's native spies and from Boer deserters, sources which were proved by events to be insufficient. In justice to all concerned, and especially to the higher command, it should be clearly understood that all this was in logical accordance with the general plan of operations. The aim was to creep in stealthily, without alarming the quarry, and to pounce only when the whole trap was complete. But Viljoen, great as his embarrassments were, had two sources of strength. He scouted, and he retained the resolution to escape. Informed pretty accurately of the nature of the trap, and of the steps taken to close it, he had the spirit not to wait until his last exit was closed; in other words, until a heavy infantry column, marching by a long and circuitous route, should close the Blood River valley.

Viljoen escapes, Apr. 20–22.

In the afternoon of the 20th, when Blood and Benson reached Blinkwater, the hundred Boksburgers who had abandoned Viljoen surrendered themselves, and reported that the main body had broken away to the south on the night before. Uncontradicted by native reports, the news seemed worthy of belief, and for several days later the impression prevailed that Viljoen had crossed the railway and won his safety. It was with a somewhat exaggerated caution, therefore, that the subject of these conjectures mapped the course of his night march. Anxious to give a wide berth to Benson, who, at Blinkwater, overlooked the broad eastern mouth of the valley, he made a circuit to the north-west, led his force up a bridle-path through the southern extremity of the Tautesberg, and at 3 A.M. on the 21st gained the head of Buffel's Kloof, a narrow and precipitous gorge which descends in a

westerly direction to the Blood River. Here he rested till 2 P.M., and then dropped down to the valley. It was on this morning that W. Kitchener had left Fort Weber, thirty-three miles to the north; Beatson, ten miles away on Viljoen's left, in a difficult bush-clothed country, had no suspicion of what was happening. All night long the Boers urged their tired mounts through dense scrub, and at 3 A.M. on the 22nd reached the Olifant's River at a point about three miles south of Crocodile Drift, and sixteen miles north of de Wagen Drift. Here they found a crossing-place, girth-deep and approached by steep banks, but just practicable, and at sunrise, unobserved by any British patrol, all were across. The guides had led Viljoen well. He had avoided both of Beatson's guarded drifts, and had he made a more northerly march for Commissie Drift he could scarcely have escaped a collision with Vialls, who, on this same day, the 22nd, occupied that point. The Boers continued to march till 9 A.M., and then, exhausted after nineteen hours in the saddle and three sleepless nights, came to a halt. Even now their leader gave them little rest. Afoot again at midday, they made a feint towards Pietersburg, and on the 24th turned south towards Rhenoster Kop, the scene of their fight with Paget in November 1900. On the 25th they reached Blackwood Camp, sixteen miles north of Balmoral Station, and rested there for several days, even finding leisure to attack, from the rear, Beatson's post at de Wagen Drift. Early in May, just as a fresh combination was being set in motion to surround their retreat, they quietly crossed the railway between Balmoral and Brugspruit, and, as the Government had done a month earlier, joined Louis Botha in the Ermelo district.

Comment.

With Viljoen's crossing of the Olifant's, the strategical interest of the operations ends. If the result was disappointing, nothing in the foregoing narrative must be taken to imply that there was any certain road to success. In whatever way they were used, Blood's mounted troops were not a match for the nimble Boer partisans working in a country they knew by heart. The point rather is that the operations were bad practice for the mounted arm, and that it would

have been better to fail in the pursuit of a true ideal, even if it involved reverses, than in the pursuit of a false ideal.

The columns clear the country, Apr. 21–May 4.

Clearing work was continued by all the six columns with great zeal and energy. The results were large; for the whole country was in a ferment and families with their cattle and goods were trekking hither and thither in the search for hiding-places. Park and Beatson worked from the same centres as before. Benson joined with W. Kitchener in scouring the Tautesberg and then moved to Roos Senekal. Pulteney was already in possession of this little hamlet, where, on first marching in (April 22), he had received the surrender of the landdrost and sixty burghers.* From Roos Senekal Benson proceeded to Dullstroom with orders to co-operate with Douglas against Taute's commando of Lydenburgers and other small local bands which had taken refuge in an intricate and precipitous group of hills known as Roodekranz, on the left bank of the Crocodile River. An enveloping movement was there attempted, but without success.

Results of the operations.

In the first days of May the six columns were gradually withdrawn and the operations brought to an end. Park retired to Lydenburg; Benson and Douglas to Belfast; W. Kitchener, harrying the Bothasberg on his way, completed his southerly march at Middelburg. Pulteney, having occupied Roos Senekal for a week, left it for Middelburg on April 29, but at Blinkwater turned right about and made a rapid night march back to the village. As he had expected, it had been re-occupied promptly by the enemy. A small laager was discovered and attacked at daylight, but most of the Boers escaped to the hills, leaving behind them a few dead and wounded. The re-occupation in itself was significant; still more so was the fact that the Boers had brought with them eleven wagons and a herd of cattle, which fell into Pulteney's hands. Reckoning up the total spoil at the end of the operations, it was found that about

* Ransacking the farms and kloofs in the neighbourhood, his Royals and Inniskillings had come on two *cachés* established in the rocks by the Transvaal Government before its flight. In one were found official documents of considerable interest, in another a large store of paper money.

1,100 Boers had been taken, mostly through voluntary surrender. All the guns in the district were accounted for. Of these a Krupp and a pom-pom were taken intact, while a "Long Tom," the 4·7 gun captured at Helvetia in December last, a 15-pdr., another Krupp, 2 pom-poms, and 2 Maxims, were found destroyed. 540 rifles, 204,450 rounds of ammunition, 247 horses and 611 wagons and carts were also obtained, together with immense numbers of cattle and sheep. Many mills and granaries were destroyed, and several hundred families removed to concentration camps. And yet the work was only begun. So rich were the resources of the district, and so many its natural fastnesses, that long months of incessant work would have been required to effect its thorough clearance. Pulteney's experience at Roos Senekal was only one symptom of the process that followed when the British columns were withdrawn. Knots of Boers descended from their lairs, rifles were exhumed, wagons spirited up from inaccessible kloofs, and the life of the district to a great extent revived. Nevertheless, the moral effect of the operations, like those of French, was considerable. It is easy to make the criticism that the work was brought to a premature close. This was true; but it was equally true that, under the inexorable conditions of a guerilla war extending over such a vast area, all operations had to be brought to a premature close. Pressure at one point meant relaxation at another; relaxation brought about the need for fresh pressure, and so on in a vicious circle. In this instance the troops had to be withdrawn to operate afresh in the districts south of the Delagoa railway, only recently swept by French and immediately returned to by the enemy.

Plumer's subsequent movements, Apr. 28–May 5.

Before bringing this chapter to an end, it remains only to follow Plumer's movements and some small operations connected with them. During his occupation of the drifts, Plumer's communications with Pietersburg had been very effectively secured by troops brought up from Pretoria. Two companies of the Wiltshire Regiment had been posted at Chune's Poort, and supply convoys had been forwarded under the escort of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, one of

the recently raised irregular corps under the command of Lt.-Col. Grenfell, with Lt.-Cols. Wilson and Colenbrander as wing-leaders. The corps, which was destined to operate long in the Pietersburg district, was already doing some good work on its own account. Grenfell was lucky in having as his intelligence officer Lieut. Shepstone (a grandson of Sir Theophilus), who owned a farm in the district, knew the Kaffir language, and was thoroughly acquainted with its inhabitants, both Boer and native.* Plumer watched the Olifant's River till April 28, an uneventful vigil, save for a smart little exploit near Commissie Drift, which is worth recording as an example of individual enterprise on exactly the right lines.† When Blood's columns were withdrawn, Plumer too was ordered back to Pretoria and left Commissie Drift on April 29. On his way south he was ordered to co-operate with Beatson in the district south of the Eland's River and west of the Olifant's River. A third column, under Colonel Allenby, was thrown into the small angle formed by the Wilge and Olifant's Rivers. While Beatson and Allenby made some small captures, the largest Boer band fled across Plumer's front towards the northern railway. Horse-sickness had so greatly impaired the mobility of Plumer's force, that only 260 good mounts could be mustered for a pursuit. With these, Major Vialls galloped down part of the Boer convoy and took 37 prisoners, but the rest crossed the railway near Haman's Kraal and escaped.

Plumer reached Eerstefabrieken on May 5.

* On April 26 47 Boers were taken at Klipdam, 15 miles north of Pietersburg, and on the 30th at Berg Plaats, 23 miles east of Pietersburg, the "Long Tom" which Plumer's men had sought in vain, the last survivor of the four originally in the possession of the Boers, was captured, but not before its owners had blown it up with dynamite. By May 6, Grenfell had accounted for 166 Boers.

† On the 24th, 42 Boers, under Commandant Schroeder, were marked down by Lieutenant Reid and a party of 20 Bushmen. Reid stalked them, and at night, contrived to surround them, Sergeants Stocker and Ward showing great skill and pluck in creeping through the Boer sentries. At daybreak, imagining himself to be surrounded by a superior force, Schroeder surrendered. Reid sustained the imposture, disarmed the Boers and marched them back with all their transport and a Maxim gun to Commissie Drift. With this party included, Plumer had taken 111 prisoners since he left Pietersburg.

OPERATIONS OF
GENERALS PLUMER & BLOOD
IN THE
NORTH EASTERN TRANSVAAL
April 1901.
DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Scale of Miles
5 0 5 10 15 20 25 30
WATERBERG
PIET POTGIETERS RUST
Moord Drift Sta
Naboom Spruit
Middelfn
NYLSTROOM
Apl 1
Tweefontein
Buis Kop
Warm baths
29
Pienaars River
28
Hamanskraal
Waterval
Plumer March 26
PRETORIA
Eerstefabrieken
Van der Merwe
Bronkhorstspruit
Wilge River
Balmoral
Brugspruit
Witbank
Great Olifants
Wilge R.
Blackwood Camp
25
Rhenoster Kop
24
Zustershoek
Enkeldoorns
Kwagga's Drift
Kameelpoort Nek
Witnek
Vrieskraal
Beatson
19 Apl
Crocodile Drift
22
Krokodil Kop
Strydpoort
Smitsdorp
Rotterdam
Bloemhof
Marabastad
8-13
7
5
3
FLAT BUSH COUNTRY
BUSH
BUSH
BUSH
ZOUTP
STRYDP

ANSBERG
To Wood Bush
Doornhoek
Bergplaats
ETERSBURG
Haenertsburg
Oud Agatha
Leydsdorp
Malips Poort
DRAKENSBERG
Chune's Poort
Port Scheiding
Tiger's Poort
Tabakplaats
De Beer
M'Phatlele's Location
Blaauw bloemjeskloof Drift
Olifants Poort
Colvin
Bathfontein Drift
Adriaan's Draai
SECOKUNILAND
To Lydenburg
OHRIGSTAD
Spekboom R.
Fort Weber
Magnet Heights
Krugers Post
Paardeplaats
Waterval
Park
14 Apl
LYDENBURG
14 Apl.
Bosch Hoek
Kwaggashoek
ROOS SENEKAL
Mapochs Gronden
STEENKAMPSBERG
Witklip
12-13
Zwagershoek
Badfontein
Blaauwbank
Leeuwfontein
Laatste Drift
Blinkwater
Windhoek
Palmietfontein
Joubertsfontein
DULLSTROOM
Kareekraal
Roodepoort
Roodekranz
Elandskloof
Klipspruit
Zwartkopjes
Helvetia
Lakenvlei
Waterval Boven
Waterval Onder
Machadodorp
Douglas Apl. 9
Monument Hill
BELFAST
Pulteney Apl 12-15
Bankfontein 16-17
Beatson
Blood & Benson
Dalmanutha
Pan
Wonderfontein
Witkyk

CHAPTER IX

CLOSE OF THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN, 1901

Western Transvaal, Free State, and Cape Colony

(February–May, 1901)

We have now brought events in the Eastern Transvaal, from Pietersburg in the north to the Natal border in the south, down to the beginning of the winter. It remains to carry the campaign in the Western Transvaal, in the Free State, and in Cape Colony down to this same point, which marks a distinct epoch in the history of the guerilla war. Scheme of the chapter.

I. Western Transvaal.

(February–May)

It was at the beginning of February that we broke off the narrative in the Western Transvaal.* At that date there were three British forces in the field. Babington with 2,000 men held an intrenched camp on the Naauwpoort heights, eight miles south of Olifant's Nek; Cunningham with 2,300 men was at Roodepoort, on the branch railway between Krugersdorp and Johannesburg; and on the Bechuanaland border, in the far west, Methuen was at Taungs. The only Boer "force in being" was that of Smuts in the Gatsrand. This force had just captured Modderfontein Post and, firmly established on the heights above it, had repulsed Cunningham's attack and compelled that general to retire to Roode- Situation in the Western Transvaal, beg. of Feb. Map, Western Transvaal, end of volume.

* See chap. iv., p. 116.

poort. De la Rey himself, in the hills to the west of Babington, was inactive; but Kemp, his ablest and most daring lieutenant, having ended a long partnership with Beyers in the first days of French's big movement,* had just brought back the Krugersdorp commando to its own district and was endeavouring to supply his men with fresh horses and equipment. Save for the small detachments which made up Smuts's force, the commandos, generally speaking, were dispersed over their own districts.

De la Rey's difficulties.

On the Boer side, the spirit of offence in the Western Transvaal had begun to die down. The stirring memories of Nooitgedacht were growing faint, and the small success won by Smuts at Modderfontein did little to revive enthusiasm. De la Rey found an increasing difficulty in persuading his burghers to quit the neighbourhood of their homes and permit the amalgamation of small local groups into compact striking forces. Another of his cares was the scarcity of horses. In despatches written to his Government at this period he complains bitterly of his need for remounts, a need he was trying to meet, and eventually did meet, by purchases in the Free State. Meanwhile his headquarters were in the Zwartruggens, that wild region of bush and mountain lying to the west of the Magaliesberg. Here it was his policy to keep constantly within call a "flying commando" of picked men on picked horses, with which he could speed at short notice to any threatened point within the Western Transvaal. Outside the border he was resolved not to go; for although in the month of February there was some question of a descent on Cape Colony to support de Wet's invasion, in March, on a report from Hertzog of de Wet's total failure, the idea, for the time, was abandoned.

Kitchener's plans for the West.

With his limited resources strained to the utmost by French's movement against Botha and by de Wet's raid upon Cape Colony, Kitchener could do no more than throw two additional columns into the Western Transvaal. Lieut.-Colonel Shekleton † was given 1200 men of the new Mounted Infantry

* See chap. vi., p. 163, footnote.

† Shekleton's Column.—6th M.I., 8th M.I., 4 guns "P" Battery, 2 guns 38th Battery, 2 pom-poms.

and six guns; and Lieut.-Colonel Benson * (the officer whom we have seen since working under Blood) took the field with 1,400 men and six guns, thrown together from many sources and comprising no less than fourteen combatant units. Kitchener's main concern was to prevent a diversion by De la Rey which might dislocate French's movement, and at the same time to drive the enemy from the country round Johannesburg and Pretoria in order to permit the resumption of civil life in these important towns and in the mining districts near them. Smuts had to be dislodged from the Gatsrand and Kemp from the Krugersdorp district. Dealing with the former first, Kitchener ordered Cunningham from Roodepoort, Benson from Potchefstroom and Shekleton's column (temporarily under the command of Colonel Flint) from Elandsfontein, to converge on the Gatsrand and attack Smuts. To supplement this movement Methuen was ordered to march up from the western border to Klerksdorp, while Babington, at Naauwpoort, was to keep De la Rey under observation; instructions which Babington interpreted in rather too literal a sense.

British difficulties.

These and all subsequent movements needed some strong controlling hand in the field. Hitherto French had been in control; but French, as we know, was now sent to the east and there was no one to take his place. Here, as elsewhere, the problem of local control was never properly solved. A bad system was being evolved, centralised at head-quarters and at the same time lacking the vitality which might have been given to it by more enterprise in the field, willingness to take risks and unselfish loyalty between column-commanders. Nor must the more fundamental difficulties be forgotten. Bases of supply were few, permitting but a limited radius of action; district intelligence and field intelligence were alike very imperfect; mounted troops were not only deficient but were constantly undergoing change.

* Benson's Column.—Mounted troops, 580, viz., detachments of 12th Lancers, 9th Batt. I.Y., 6th Imp. Bushmen (New South Wales), Imp. Light Horse and Kitchener's Horse. Infantry, 636, viz., detachments of 2nd Cheshires, 1st R. Welsh Fusiliers, 1st Derbyshires, 1st Border Regiment, and 2nd Northamptons. 2 guns "P" Battery, and 2 guns "Q" Battery; 1 gun 37th Battery, 2 guns 78th Battery; 1 pom-pom (G 2 Sect.).

The movement against Smuts, Feb. 9–24.

The movement against Smuts, who had moved to Buffelsdoorn Pass in the western part of the range, began on February 9, when Cunningham left Roodepoort. The want of a definite field-commander at once became apparent; for Flint, marching from Elandsfontein, misunderstood his orders, received no correction and after a week's marching circled back to Meyerton. Cunningham and Benson met at Buffelsdoorn on the 14th, to find that Smuts had quietly slipped away to the Losberg. Puzzled by conflicting reports, the columns slowly followed, and before they reached the Losberg Smuts had again vanished. This time the Boer leader dismissed to their farms the local men and with a few hundred followers crossed the branch railway at Witrand and made off to the north-west. On the 24th the three British columns came into Potchefstroom.

Methuen's march from Taungs to Klerksdorp, Feb. 2–18.

In the meantime Methuen, in one of those tedious marches which so frequently fell to his lot, had been working up doggedly from the western border. Leaving Taungs on February 2 and pushing before him scattered bands of the enemy, he was at Wolmaransstad on the 12th and rested till the 14th. Three days later, at the farm Rietfontein, news came that Du Toit of Wolmaransstad, Celliers, the new leader of the Lichtenburg commando, and Liebenberg of Potchefstroom had concentrated a force at Hartebeestfontein, 16 miles north-west of Klerksdorp. Methuen at once resolved to attack, and, on local reports as to the nature of the position, made a wide circuit to the north. The first results were good. Celliers had left his laager at Brakpan and at dawn on the 18th Lieut.-Colonel von Donop and the Bushmen raided and captured the whole of it, together with forty prisoners. But when he approached the Boer position, Methuen found it to be far stronger than the maps indicated or his informants had led him to expect. The enemy, too, had been reinforced. De la Rey, with his flying commando, eluding the watch of Babington, had ridden down from the north and found himself in command of about 1,300 men. These were intrenched on the Cyferlaagte ridge, just to the north of the village of Hartebeestfontein. As the subsequent narrative will show, this was a favourite Boer rendezvous and a

continual source of danger to Klerksdorp and the neighbouring garrisons. Methuen never declined a fight, and though his fighting strength was barely 900, he began the assault at 8 A.M.

Action of Hartebeestfontein, Feb. 18.

The 5th I.Y. and a pom-pom, which was handled by Lieutenant Venning with remarkable audacity, were sent against the Boer left and the 10th I.Y. against the right. In the latter quarter the attack was reinforced by the Victorian Imperial Regiment, the 6th Imperial Bushmen, and two companies of the Loyal North Lancashires, and under the direction of Lord Erroll, was pressed with great gallantry; but little or no impression was made on the defence. At 11 A.M. De la Rey made a counter-attack on the British left, which met with a sharp repulse, and in the afternoon the Boers left the position, leaving 18 dead on the field. Methuen's loss was 49 killed and wounded. This action cleared the road to Klerksdorp, which Methuen entered on the next day, having covered a distance of 150 miles since leaving Taungs. The Boer gathering broke up, Liebenberg and Du Toit sending their burghers back to their homes, while De la Rey, Celliers and Smuts, who now rejoined his chief, moved off to the north-west on an enterprise which they took care to keep a profound secret.

The movement against Kemp, March 1–3.

Methuen and Benson now took a cast up the valley of the Schoon Spruit and were back at Klerksdorp and Frederikstad respectively on March 4. Benson was then sent to clear the Gatsrand systematically; and Methuen started on a long expedition to the Free State, with the object of relieving Hoopstad. In the meantime Babington, in conjunction with Cunningham and Shekleton, who now replaced Flint, was ordered to eject Kemp and other local bands from the Krugersdorp district. Cunningham and Shekleton started from Krugersdorp on March 1 with instructions to sweep along the Witwatersberg towards Babington's position at Naauwpoort. Kemp, who was at Dwarsvlei, instantly took the alarm and on the 2nd rode away with 400 men to join De la Rey in the west. Characteristically, he chose the most dangerous exit, namely, the valley, barely three miles broad, between the Magaliesberg and Naauwpoort, though

he knew that 2,000 men overlooked his line of march. Babington, having been there for a month, and having chosen the position himself as the key to the whole district, might reasonably have been expected to keep a better watch; but Kemp passed the point of danger during the same night and disappeared. He had moved in the nick of time, for on the 3rd Cunningham and Shekleton crossed his trail, and Babington's mounted men scoured the valley he had traversed a few hours before. The columns were engaged in clearing the district of other small bands when, on March 6, news arrived which put an end to the work, and for a moment, indeed, brought to a halt every column in the Western Transvaal, and turned every eye towards the isolated garrison of Lichtenburg, far away in the north-west.

De la Rey attacks Lichtenburg, March 2–3.

Lichtenburg was in Methuen's district and had been occupied since November 1900. It was held by six weak companies of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and 100 Yeomanry (South Notts Company and Paget's Horse), with two guns manned by New Zealanders; 620 officers and men, all told, under Lieut.-Colonel C. G. C. Money. The village, which contained large stores of provisions, stood completely isolated in the midst of a hostile country. Methuen, its natural guardian, was now far away at the southern extremity of his vast district, and the nearest British columns were seventy or eighty miles to the eastward. De la Rey thought the time favourable for an assault upon his native town. With the contingents of Celliers and Smuts and his own picked commando he had about 1,200 men and one gun. Like all South African villages, Lichtenburg is built round a central market-square where the wagons of the farmers are wont to out-span. It is a pretty little place. Streamlets of water flow down the streets and the houses stood in the midst of a profusion of trees and undergrowth, very pleasing to the eye, but from the defensive point of view very embarrassing. Money's pickets, intrenched at intervals round the edge of the town, had an imperfect field of fire, and the market-place, which was held in force as the main position, was under the same disability.

Map.

In the course of the night of March 2 the Boers, un-

LICHTENBURG

showing the

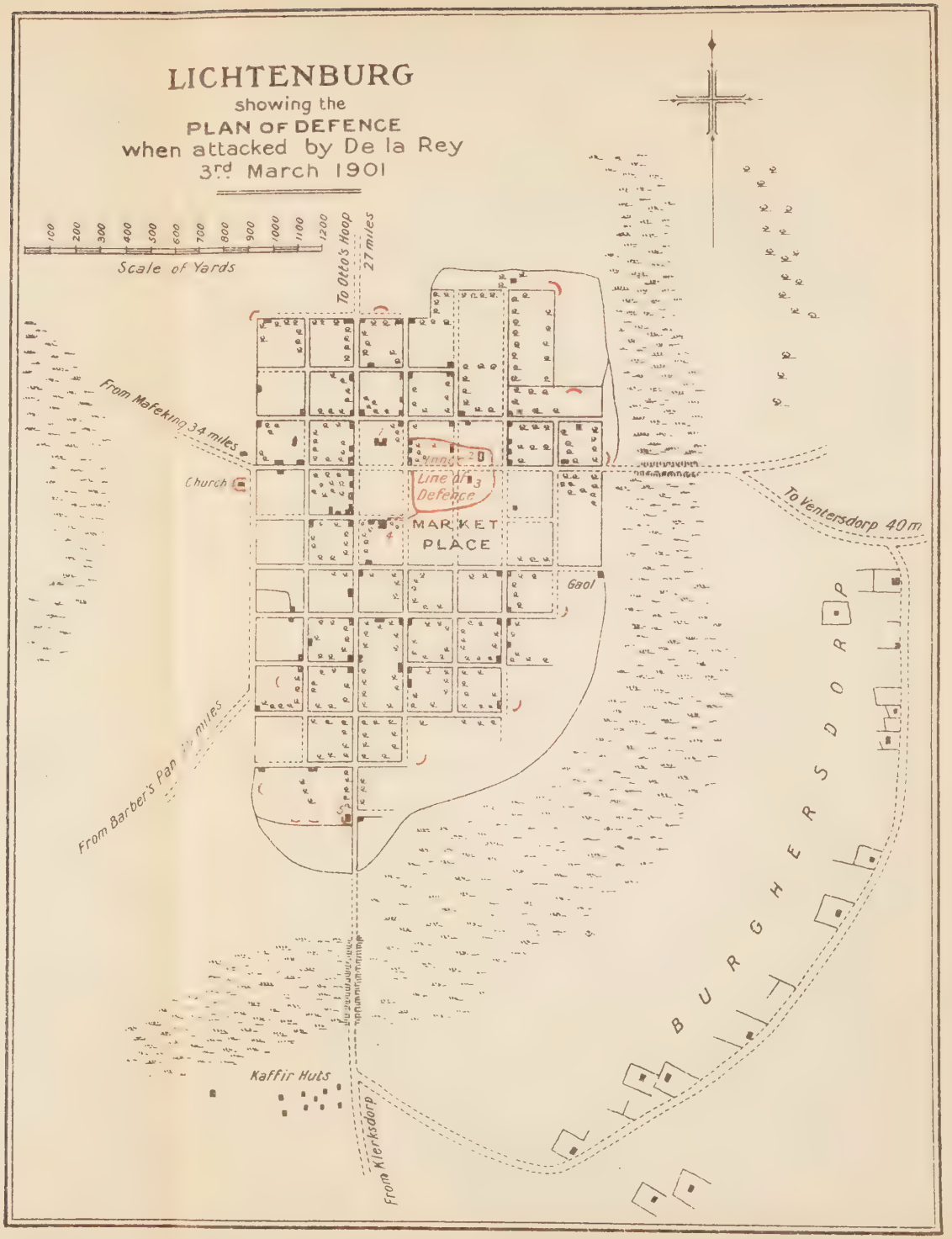
PLAN OF DEFENCE

when attacked by De la Rey

3rd March 1901

DIRECTIONS

1 School house used as hospital.
2 Dopper Church used for Magazine. All horses were sheltered inside during attack.
3 Old Church used as Supply Store.
4 The Court House. & 5. A Private house occupied by troops.
⌒ Trenches for the pickets; the large red enclosure the Inner Line of Defence.
═ Roads with hedges, or wire fences
::::: Do without " " "



Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd Lith London

detected by the British, completely surrounded the town, some of them, aided by sympathisers from within, even managing to creep between the pickets and penetrate the streets. At 3.15 A.M. on the 3rd the first alarm was given, and immediately afterwards fire broke out on three sides of the outer line and from within the town itself. In a few minutes the inner line was manned in full strength, and at the outset two small reinforcements were sent to the pickets. After that, all communication with them was lost and they had to fight their own battles. During the dark hours little execution was done on either side, but at dawn the attack was hotly pressed and lasted the whole day. Ensconced among the trees and around the position, the Boers surrounded all the pickets (save one in the north-west corner) with overwhelming numbers. From the first they were met with the finest pluck and tenacity, only one of these small posts succumbing, and that late in the day. Lieutenants James, De H. Larpent, Nelson and Wreford Brown (all of the Northumberland Fusiliers) deserve especial mention for the gallantry with which they defended their trenches and sangars, while there were many individual cases of heroism in the carrying of messages through the enemy, in bringing up ammunition and in rescuing the wounded under fire. So obstinate was the resistance made by the pickets, that the Boers, as the day wore on, became thoroughly disheartened and never attempted a general assault on the central position. At 5.30 P.M. firing was suspended by mutual agreement for two hours, so as to permit the removal of dead and wounded before dark. It was renewed at the end of the armistice, but on the Boer side with no spirit. Before morning, De la Rey withdrew his force with a loss of 14 killed and 38 wounded, General Celliers being among the latter. Money's casualties were two officers and 16 men killed, and 24 men wounded. So ended a fine defence.*

Repulse of the attack.

News of the attack, but not of its issue, reaching Kitchener on the 6th, Babington and Shekleton were ordered at once to march to the relief, and Cunningham was sent to replace Babington at Naauwpoort. Benson was called into Potchef-

Babington marches against De la Rey, March 6–21.

* After this attack the trees in Lichtenburg were cut down.

stroom, and Methuen, who was at Commando Drift on the 7th, was warned to hold his force in readiness. On the 8th, when it was definitely known that Lichtenburg was safe, Benson returned to the Gatsrand, while Babington and Shekleton prepared to find and attack De la Rey. But just at this time the same heavy rains which were hampering French so much on the Swazi border delayed the operations against De la Rey. It was not till the 15th that the two British leaders, who had effected a junction at Ventersdorp on the 11th, received sufficient supplies from Potchefstroom to enable them to march. Then, owing to a dearth of intelligence, they took the wrong direction, marching west for three days towards Lichtenburg, whereas De la Rey, now reinforced by Kemp, had travelled south towards Klerksdorp. On the 18th, Babington changed direction, and on the 20th, still out of touch with the enemy, the two columns were at Hartebeestfontein, the scene of Methuen's action a month earlier. The Boers, in fact, had given way to the east and west to let the columns pass and had then closed in behind them, Smuts being at Paardeplaats on the evening of the 21st, while De la Rey and Kemp were somewhere near Geduld, about seven miles to the north of Hartebeestfontein. Some of their wagons were actually sighted from the hills above the village, but since the Intelligence Department had reported a general retreat of the Boers to Wolmaransstad, no great importance was attached to the news. Early on the next morning, however, while the columns were still waiting to receive supplies from Klerksdorp, a reconnoitring force of 175 Imperial Light Horse and a pom-pom was sent to the north under Major Briggs of the King's Dragoon Guards. Unusual interest attaches to this reconnaissance.

Action of Geduld, March 22.

Briggs, starting at 5.30 A.M., sent forward Captain Donaldson's squadron to the farm Geduld, to ascertain the truth of last night's rumour. Before long a message came back that De la Rey with a large convoy had passed Geduld on the previous evening. Meanwhile, observers on some high ground to Briggs's right had seen Boers in the distance galloping down on a party of Donaldson's scouts who had advanced some distance north of the farm and, unaware

of their danger, were now leisurely returning. Briggs at once galloped forward with his main body to extricate these men. Passing a spruit a little to the south of the farm, he met the rest of Donaldson's squadron on its way back, called on him to protect his rear, and, after detaching another squadron under Captain Normand to watch his left, pushed on with the third. The scouts, who were found to be holding an empty kraal, were duly relieved, and at 7.30 A.M. Briggs returned to the spruit, receiving a message on the way that a large force of Boers was galloping down on Normand's squadron. Donaldson, accordingly, was ordered to support him, and the two squadrons dismounted and opened fire. Briggs, with the third squadron, reached the spruit just in time to see a strange spectacle. Four hundred Boers in close formation, looking, as an eye-witness said, like a cavalry brigade in mass, were charging down over open ground upon the thin, extended line of the I.L.H. The latter just had time to mount and retire towards the spruit when the Boers swept over the position, the front rank firing from their saddles at the retreating troopers. Then they swerved, and whirling away across the front, disappeared behind a hill to the east. Harmless as it was in this instance, the manœuvre was profoundly suggestive for the future.

Brave retirement of the I.L.H.

With all three squadrons under his hand, Briggs began his retirement to camp. De la Rey and Kemp, though they made no more mounted charges, pressed him hard for four miles, attacking from every quarter with superior numbers and great vehemence. Handling his men with the utmost coolness and precision under very perilous circumstances, Briggs fought his way back slowly and steadily, and at midday, with a loss in killed and wounded of five officers and eighteen men, gained the hills above Hartebeestfontein. It was a retirement that did great honour to the regiment and its leader.

Babington pursues to the north, March 23-24.

Babington now replied with a vigorous pursuit to the north, his own column on the right and Shekleton's on the left. It appears that De la Rey had been counting on a British advance up the east bank of the Schoon Spruit, and that his intention had been to allow the first columns to pass

him and then to fall on their rear. Taken wholly aback by a direct advance west of the Schoon Spruit, he beat a hasty retreat, hampered by a large wagon-train. On the 23rd the columns were close at his heels, but in the evening he had managed to reach the Taaibosch Spruit while the columns bivouacked close to the Kaal Spruit, Shekleton at Kaffir's Kraal, and Babington at Syferkuil. Before daylight next morning the pursuit was resumed with the mounted troops of both columns. Shekleton, on the left, was the first to get into touch with the enemy, near Zwartlaagte. In the first glimmer of dawn his advance-guard of M.I., under Captain Logan of the Cheshire Militia, supported by two guns of the 38th Battery, rushed a commanding kopje held by Boer pickets. Supports and guns were hastened up, and a farm where a number of Boers were seen to be saddling-up in some confusion was shelled at short range with good results. Another mile's advance and the Boer convoy and guns were sighted in the distance, struggling northward in feverish haste. They gained some respite, however, owing to an unfortunate check imposed upon Shekleton's pursuit, due to the difficulty of passing orders over so broad a front. But as soon as Babington's New Zealanders and Bushmen, led by Colonel Grey, came up into line, a general pursuit began. De la Rey's faint efforts to interpose resistance were swept aside, and after twelve miles' hard riding the Colonials overtook the enemy's guns and convoy at Wildfontein. By this time all the fighting Boers had abandoned the artillery and transport, so that there was scarcely any resistance. The guns were captured without a struggle, and, for five miles further, Grey's and Shekleton's men followed the line of retreat, seizing wagons and prisoners, until the exhaustion of the horses brought the chase to an end. At the trivial cost of nine casualties, Babington captured two 15-pounder guns (taken by the Boers at Colenso), a pom-pom, six Maxims, a great store of ammunition, seventy-seven wagons and carts, mostly belonging to Kemp, and 140 prisoners.

Action of Wildfontein, March 24.

Comments on the action.

It was the only marked success that had yet been won in the Western Transvaal, and it was gained by a bold tactical initiative with good mounted troops. During the whole day

Babington's transport was far behind and wholly in the air, but it was amply defended by the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and a few mounted troops, who were able to repulse a somewhat determined attack. In any other war the success would have had a lasting moral effect. In this war it caused but a transient depression among the Boers, who, by unblushingly deserting their artillery and transport, had kept their fighting force almost intact, and who never wasted vain regrets over guns and wagons.

Changes in command.

Unable, for lack of supplies, to follow up their success, Babington and Shekleton returned to Ventersdorp and remained there till the end of the month. Meanwhile a fresh arrangement of troops and commands were made. Shekleton's column, strengthened by detachments of Roberts's Horse and Kitchener's Horse, was given to Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson. Benson, who had done a good month's work in the Gatsrand, was sent to operate under Blood, and the greater part of his mounted troops was added to Cunningham's force, which for the past three weeks had been inactive at Naauwpoort. Cunningham himself relinquished the command, and was succeeded by Brig.-General H. G. Dixon, with Shekleton acting under him as leader of the mounted troops. Finally, the general control of these columns and the command of the "District West of Johannesburg," was assumed by Major-General Mildmay Willson.* As a step towards decentralisation the appointment was of little significance. Every measure of importance and many of slight moment were still submitted to Kitchener, who never let slip from his fingers a single thread in the vast web he was weaving.

Night-raid at Goedvooruitzicht, Ap. 13–14.

De la Rey had dispersed his forces again, taking Kemp to Tafel Kop and sending Smuts back to the Kaal Spruit as soon as Babington had left the neighbourhood. Other bands of 200 or 300 roamed about between Ventersdorp and Potchefstroom and almost within sight of Klerksdorp, but knowledge of their numbers and movements was of the vaguest.

* At the same time the Johannesburg-Klerksdorp railway was divided into two sections, that from Johannesburg to Welverdiend under Colonel Grove, and the rest under Colonel Kekewich.

Babington,* at the beginning of April, took a cast northward to Tafel Kop, only to find that De la Rey had just flown. He and Rawlinson, who acted under his orders, then turned south and swept down the rich valley of the Schoon Spruit, with a column on each side of the stream. This expedition was productive of nothing but stock and mealies, but on April 13, when at Witpoort, a few miles north of Klerksdorp, Babington heard that Smuts's commando was laagered at Goedvooruitzicht, fifteen miles away, and determined to pounce on it by a night march. His own and Rawlinson's mounted troops paraded at midnight, and at dawn on the 14th effected a complete surprise of the laager, Kitchener's Horse, of Rawlinson's column, galloping down and capturing the wagons at a stroke, together with a 12-pounder gun† and a pom-pom. This was one of the first examples of a class of operation which became very effective in the latter part of the war. It depended, however, on the most accurate and reliable intelligence, and this was rarely to be got in the Western Transvaal. Peculiarly vulnerable by night, the Boers, nevertheless, retained their tactical superiority by day, and in this instance, though very inferior in numbers, gave a good deal of trouble to the force which had surprised them. One party, rallied by Wolmarans (for Smuts himself was not present), made a counter-attack, in the course of which a detachment crept unperceived round the British rear and opened fire at close range on "P" Battery. At the same moment Sir Henry Rawlinson, who was riding alone on a ridge in rear of the battery, was surrounded, had his horse shot under him, and for a few minutes was actually in the hands of the enemy. The guns, however, came promptly into action rear, dispersed the Boers, and enabled their distinguished prisoner, not, however, as completely equipped as usual, to escape. Desultory fighting went

* It was decided that for the future Babington was to be based on Ventersdorp, where a month's supplies for 5,000 men and horses were to be collected and maintained, but so alarming were the reports of Boers on the line of supply from Potchefstroom and so small was the reserve of troops available for escort that convoys often had to be held back, and in the meantime Babington depended on Klerksdorp.

† Captured from "O" Battery R.H.A., at Zilikats Nek, in July, 1900.

on till 2 o'clock, and then Babington withdrew the force to the farm Brakspruit on the Schoon Spruit. Here, and a little later at Syferkuil on the Kaal Spruit, he remained for three weeks awaiting reinforcements, while the Boers gathered in their old haunts or wandered at large over the country. A strong concentration was reported at Hartebeestfontein, and in order to deal with it, Babington asked for the help of Dixon's Naauwpoort force. This was refused by Kitchener, who thought Babington strong enough, but the latter, thinking otherwise, confined himself to somewhat aimless demonstrations.

Babington at Brakspruit and Syferkuil, Ap. 14–May 3.

In the meantime he was being supplied from Klerksdorp, and the only notable episode in the three weeks was the spirited defence of one of his convoys on its way to that town. The convoy, with an escort of 200 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 200 8th M.I., and two 15-pounders, was in charge of Major Lyle of the R.W.F. At 1 P.M. on April 22nd, just as he was leaving Brakspruit after the mid-day halt, Lyle was attacked by three Boer detachments, each about 200 strong. Two galloped up from the Lapfontein hills on the right rear and one from the Platberg on the left front. Lyle acted with promptitude and judgment. One of the Lapfontein detachments, attempting to cross the Schoon Spruit, was held back by 50 of the North Stafford Company M.I.; the other, hurrying round by the Witpoort Drift, raced for some kopjes commanding the Klerksdorp road on the right front, but was forestalled by Lyle's right flank guards. Some of the Platberg contingent seized a hill on the left of the road within 600 yards of the British guns. These would have suffered severely but for the gallant conduct of a handful of the 8th M.I. under Lieutenant Goodwyn, who attacked the kopje against heavy odds and sacrificed themselves in the effort to cover the artillery. Two men were killed, three wounded, and eight, having fired away all their cartridges, were taken prisoners. But the end was achieved, and the guns were retired undamaged. The Boer attack flickered out and the convoy reached Klerksdorp safely.

Action of Platberg, Ap. 22.

Incidents such as this, taken with the affairs of Geduld, Wildfontein and Goedvooruitzicht, prove that Babington's

A combined movement planned, end of April.

troops had excellent moral and fighting quality, and suggest the conclusion that they might have been used with greater freedom and boldness. Sham demonstrations and profitless marches breed staleness in the best troops. The incident also shows how little the Boers had suffered and how audaciously they hovered round the columns and garrison towns. At the beginning of May, indeed, the situation was so bad that a resolute effort had to be made to expel them from the triangle Lichtenburg-Ventersdorp-Klerksdorp by a combined operation, in which Methuen and Dixon were to share. The prior movements of these two leaders necessitate a short digression.

Dixon April 7–29.

When Dixon, on April 7, took over the command of the Naauwpoort force, he had at his disposal, in addition to 1,000 infantry and eight guns, about 900 mounted men; but all his Yeomanry and many of his Colonials were fresh untrained drafts.* A good deal of doubt prevailed as to the functions of this force. Kitchener finally directed that Dixon, while always leaving a sufficient garrison at the intrenched camp of Naauwpoort, should operate to the east and west of it, but not further south than Ventersdorp. This direction held good as long as Babington was south of Ventersdorp; if he operated north of it, Dixon was to be free for independent action elsewhere. During April Dixon confined himself to the work of training his raw troops by giving them the comparatively safe and easy work of clearing portions of the Krugersdorp district. It was on the 28th that he received orders to march to Tafel Kop in pursuance of the combined movement against De la Rey. He marched on the 29th with 1,700 men.

Methuen March 4–May 3.

Methuen had been far afield during the past two months. Marching south from Klerksdorp on March 4 and raiding Wolmaransstad on the night of the 5th, he had reached Commando Drift, only to find the Vaal too high to be crossed. The relief of Hoopstad, therefore, had to be post-

* Dixon's Column.—7th Batt. I.Y., 314; Imperial Light Horse, 127; 5th New Zealand M.I., 174; Scottish Horse, 315; 1st Derby Regiment, 594; 2nd Worcester Regiment, 452; 8th Battery (four guns); 28th Battery (two guns); 39th Battery (one howitzer); one 4·7 gun; one pom-pom (½ 2 Sect.).

poned, and the column proceeded to Fourteen Streams on the Kimberley railway. Thence, marching by the south bank of the Vaal, Lord Erroll succeeded in relieving Hoopstad, which had long been in a state of even greater isolation than Lichtenburg. Since it was a useless and burdensome post the garrison of 600 men was withdrawn by Kitchener's orders, and brought in to Fourteen Streams on April 7. The rest of the month was spent in reorganisation. Methuen's seasoned Australians being now time-expired, their place was taken by 1,300 of the newly-enlisted Yeomanry (drafts for the 3rd, 5th, and 10th Battalions), who had to be mounted, equipped and given some sort of training before they could be used. In the meantime the old Yeomanry stayed with him for one last trek, and the gap left by the Australians was partially filled by small colonial detachments. Half a company of the Bedfordshire Regiment and two howitzers of the 37th Field Battery, were also added. At this time, too, Lord Erroll gave up the leadership of the mounted troops, and was succeeded by Lieut.-Colonel F. C. Meyrick, hitherto commanding the 5th Battalion of Yeomanry. Meyrick in his turn gave place a little later to Lieut.-Colonel von Donop. Towards the end of April all the available troops were despatched by rail to Mafeking, which was to be the starting-point for their march into the Transvaal, and on May 1 Methuen finally took the field. On the 3rd he was at Lichtenburg.

Positions on May 3.

All was now ready for the combined operations in the triangle Lichtenburg-Ventersdorp-Klerksdorp. Of Willson's columns, Babington was at Syferkuil; Rawlinson, on May 2, had been sent to Brakspruit to block escape to the east; Dixon was at Tafel Kop, watching the north; and a fifth column, about 1,200 strong, which had recently been organized under Lieut.-Colonel Ingouville-Williams, and was composed of the newly-enlisted 2nd New South Wales Mounted Rifles, 800 strong, three companies of the Coldstream Guards and a section of the Australian Battery, was at Klerksdorp.

The columns converge May 4–6.

In the chronic fog of uncertainty as to the exact position of the Boer commandos one fact was certain, that the largest concentration, with De la Rey at its head, was at the old

rendezvous, Hartebeestfontein; and it was on this point, therefore, that the columns, Dixon's excepted, were ordered to converge. But by the evening of May 6, when this first phase was completed, not a single fighting Boer was left within the circle. The strong position on the heights north of the village were found to be deserted, and all that could be done for the moment was to destroy the large store of supplies which was found in the village itself. The commandos, obeying the centrifugal instinct which guided them in such circumstances, had scattered in all directions. Liebenberg crossed the Schoon Spruit on the night of the 5th, eluding Rawlinson. The Lichtenburg commando, under General Celliers and Commandant Vermaas, had butted first into Babington and then into Methuen, whose Yeomanry had lightened it of a gun.* Of De la Rey and Kemp nothing definite was known, but Methuen, who, as the senior officer present, had now assumed control of the movement, was convinced that they had gone north. After a conference with Willson the four columns present were turned in this direction, and Dixon was ordered to close in to the south.† This phase was completed on the 8th, with the result that the Lichtenburg commando, overtaken by Babington and driven into Dixon, was again somewhat mauled. This, such as it was, was the last success; for henceforward the operations lost all coherence and unity of direction. Though the country itself presented no difficulties and the distances between the columns were not excessive, it was found impossible to maintain inter-communication. The country was alive with Boer scouts, who intercepted messengers, spread false rumours, and generally played the part of Puck with their heavy antagonists. The result was that Methuen and Willson, falling out of touch with one another, acted at cross-purposes and sent contradictory orders to the same columns.

Fresh plans, May 6–8.

Cross-purposes.

On the evening of the 8th, Methuen, who was at Doornbult, having decided that De la Rey and Kemp had, after all,

* Also belonging to "O" Battery R.H.A., captured at Zilikats Nek.

† Methuen to Doornbult, Babington to Palmietfontein, Rawlinson to Korannafontein, Williams to Paardeplaats, Dixon to Leeuwfontein.

gone south, issued orders, some of which never arrived, for a general advance on a broad front towards Schweizer Reneke, Bloemhof and Wolmaransstad. On the morning of the 9th, however, having received from Rawlinson what seemed to be more trustworthy reports of a northerly move, he changed his mind, conformed to Rawlinson, who was already moving north, and marched to Biesjes Vallei on the Great Hart's River. But the scent was lost; and on the 10th, in the vain hope of recovering it, the two columns marched west to Witpan and Barber's Pan, while orders were sent to Babington to conform by marching to Rooirantjesfontein. In the meantime, Willson, acting with the best of intentions, but utterly in the dark, had ordered Babington and Williams to march south. The upshot of all this was that the only column to gain contact with the enemy was the weakest—that of Williams—who at Witpoort, on the 10th, came upon a Boer force, which had slipped unobserved round Rawlinson's left during his march to Korannafontein on the night of the 7th. Attacked with great ardour by the New South Wales troopers, the Boers, bent on secrecy rather than on fighting, gave ground and disappeared. Willson, from his knowledge of the general situation, hoped that the five columns, which were still disposed in a rough circle, would be able to "corral" this force; but in reality the combination was at an end; for on the 11th Methuen and Rawlinson marched out of the area and on the 15th were resting and refitting on the Kimberley railway. Willson sent Dixon back to Naauwpoort and brought Williams and Babington into Klerksdorp by a southerly route. The operations thus came to a sterile conclusion. Barely a hundred prisoners had been taken.

Failure of the operation.

How slight was the shock administered was proved a fortnight later. Winter in its full severity was already setting in, and any hope that had existed of crippling De la Rey before its advent had now to be abandoned.

The prospect.

II. The Free State

(February–May, 1901)

Operations after the close of the de Wet hunt, March.

During February, while de Wet was invading Cape Colony, as described in Chapter V., and fifteen British columns were trying to catch or expel him, the work of subduing the Free State ceased almost entirely.* The country, indeed, had been denuded of mobile columns, and such troops as were left were barely sufficient for holding the garrison towns and the railway. But when de Wet and Hertzog re-crossed the Orange with their exhausted forces British columns began once more to pour into the southern districts. Those of Haig, Charles Knox, and Bethune, seven in all, continued to operate for a few days longer in the angle between the Modder, the Orange and the railway, picking up stragglers and horses. By March 11th, however, all had been brought in to the railway between Bloemfontein and Springfontein. Meanwhile, Lyttelton was preparing to use Bruce Hamilton's three columns (under White, Maxwell, and Monro), which had also been set free by the cessation of the hunt, for a sweeping movement in the corresponding area, east of the railway, between the Orange and the Thaba 'Nchu-Ladybrand line of posts. The columns started on the 10th from Aliwal North, and as they moved northward were joined successively by the seven columns on the railway. On March 20th the whole line reached the Thaba 'Nchu-Ladybrand barrier, which had been specially strengthened for the occasion. This was the first drive in the Free State, and the results, 70 prisoners and a quantity of horses, were, as in all similar manœuvres, disappointing.

Lyttelton's drive.

Boer and British changes of policy, end of March.

In the Free State, during the almost universal lull which distinguished this period, important changes of policy were carried into effect both on the British and the Boer side. Convinced of the dangerous futility of ambitious adventures,

* It was only towards the end of the month that two little columns under Lieut.-Colonel Ingouville-Williams (transferred in May to the West Transvaal), and Major Pine Coffin were brought together, and in the first week of March did some useful work in clearing the Doornberg, de Wet's favourite rendezvous. In the course of these operations General Philip Botha was killed.

and with an eye to the approach of winter, when even moderate concentrations would be difficult to maintain, de Wet embraced in its most extreme form the guerilla policy of dispersion and evasion, qualified only by the pettiest sort of local warfare. With this view he divided the country, first into six, and a little while later into seven districts, each under the general control of an Acting-Commandant-General, with from three to six Commandants directing a corresponding number of sub-districts. Judge Hertzog, P. Fourie, Wessel Wessels, Badenhorst, Froneman, Michal Prinsloo and Hattingh, were the seven Acting-Commandant-Generals, and their respective districts, to follow the same order, were those of Philippolis (including West Bloemfontein), South Bloemfontein, Vrede, Boshof, Winburg, Bethlehem, and Kroonstad.* This scheme had been drawn up at a last

De Wet's district re-organisation.

* The following is a complete tabular account of the reorganisation:—

District.	Acting-Comm.-General.	Sub-District.	Commandants.
1. Philippolis, etc. (including West Bloemfontein) .	Judge J. B. M. Hertzog	Philippolis .	Munnik.
		Fauresmith .	Nieuwhoudt.
		Jacobsdal . .	Hendrik Pretorius.
		Petrusburg .	Van der Berg.
2. South Bloemfontein, etc. .	Piet Fourie .	South Bloemfontein.	Ackerman and Kolbe.
		Thaba 'Nchu .	J. P. Steyl.
		Bethulie and Smithfield.	Gideon Joubert.
		Rouxville . .	Rheeders.
		Wepener . .	R. Coetzee.
3. Vrede, etc. . .	Wessel Wessels .	Vrede . . .	Ross and Hermanus Botha.
		Harrismith .	Jan Meyer, Jan Jacobsz, Beukes.
4. Boshof, etc. .	C. C. J. Badenhorst	Boshof . . .	J. N. Jacobsz, P. P. Erasmus, H. Theunissen.
		Hoopstad . .	Jacobus Theron, A. J. Bester.
5. Winburg, etc. .	C. C. Froneman . .	Winburg . .	Haasbroek.
		Ladybrand. .	Koen.
6. Bethlehem, etc.	Michal Prinsloo .	Bethlehem. .	Olivier, Rautenbach, Bruwer.
		Ficksburg . .	Steyn (later van Niekerk).
7. Kroonstad, etc.	J. Hattingh.	Kroonstad . .	P. de Vos, Jan Celliers, Maree.
		Heilbron . .	F. E. Mentz, L. Steenekamp, J. van de Merwe.

conference held between de Wet, Steyn, Hertzog and Fourie, shortly after the crossing of the Orange.

Kitchener's district organisation, end of March.

Kitchener initiated a similar plan of his own, but on a much larger scale. His sub-division of the Free State was fourfold. Each district was entrusted to a general officer, whose duty it was with the mobile columns placed at his disposal to check concentrations, hunt up scattered bands, and at the same time clear the country systematically of all horses, supplies and cattle.* The reader will note the double aim which had already been placed before French and Blood, and which was so liable to lead to misconstruction and half measures. The commands were allotted as follows :— Lyttelton, with the columns of Bruce Hamilton, Hickman and Haig, took the southern district, whose northern boundary was a line drawn through Petrusburg, Bloemfontein and Ladybrand. Charles Knox, with the columns of Pilcher and Thorneycroft, was given the central district, extending as far north as the Boshof-Bultfontein-Winburg-Ficksburg line. The northern district, running up to the Vaal, but bounded on the east by a line drawn through Frankfort, Reitz, Bethlehem and Ficksburg, was entrusted to Major-General E. Locke Elliot, who, like Sir Bindon Blood, was summoned from India, where he had been Inspector-General of Cavalry. Elliot's troops were Bethune's Cavalry Brigade, reinforced by the Prince of Wales's Light Horse (a new corps of South African irregulars), De Lisle's column and a new brigade under Broadwood, composed of the 7th Dragoon Guards, three battalions of raw Yeomanry and six guns. The remaining portion of the Free State, that is to say, the north-eastern district between the Basuto, Natal and Transvaal borders, was nominally unaffected by the re-distribution. It had always been General Rundle's sphere, and in it, with the original Eighth Division, strengthened by detachments of mounted infantry and the new Yeomanry, he continued to hold control. It is noteworthy, however, that while all the columns allotted to the other districts

* It should be understood that the new system affected mobile columns only and left unaltered the disposition of troops on the lines of communication, which remained under Tucker's general control.

were mounted, Rundle's troops still consisted largely of infantry.

Unreality of the district system.

It has been remarked in an earlier chapter * that a rigid system of district commands was unsuited to the conditions of the war. To deal with a fluid enemy there must be a fluid organisation. This need not exclude the devolution of large powers to generals in the field; but from a multitude of causes, the whole tendency of the time was in the opposite direction. In this instance there was a special circumstance which rendered the fourfold partition of the Free State unreal from the first. Rundle's north-eastern district was more intractable, both from the nature of the country and the character of its inhabitants, than all the rest put together. It was not until ten months later that a determined effort was made to deal with it. But in the meantime, Rundle's resources being patently inadequate, it was inevitable that other generals should be called upon to supply the deficiency. This hastened the relaxation of the strict district system. For about six weeks, however, while the enemy was wholly inactive and the new mounted troops were being initiated, with a very necessary caution, into the dangerous work of war, the partition held good in its integrity. The work of these weeks may be very briefly reviewed.

Elliot's first operations, Ap. 10–20.

General Elliot organised his division † at Kroonstad, the headquarters of the Northern District. A scarcity of remounts and various details of equipment made the preparations very slow. On April 10, when about two-thirds of the force were ready, Elliot began the first of a long series of "drives," whose scope and complexity were to increase gradually during 1901. In order to give the Yeomanry and South African irregulars, who were almost destitute of training, a chance of learning their work, the first essay was short and simple. The area chosen was a belt of level country to the west of the railway, between Kroonstad and the Vaal, and through this the three columns of Broad-

* See chap. ii., p. 54.

† The composition of columns under Elliot, Knox, and Lyttelton (later Bruce Hamilton) will be found in chap. xi. At this period they were still only in process of formation.

wood, Bethune and De Lisle marched in parallel lines northward, wheeling to the east at the Vaal and converging at Vredefort Road on April 20. Two villages, Parys and Vredefort, and many outlying farms were cleared of inhabitants and supplies, but no active measures were taken against the small bands in the district. Elliot found that some of his irregulars were very far from reliable. Two small parties were captured, one by de Wet himself, who, although his headquarters now and henceforth were with the Heilbron commando, happened to be travelling through the district on his way to Petrusburg. Preparations were next made for a more extensive scheme of work, which will be chronicled at a later stage.

Knox in March and April.

In the Central and Southern Districts there is little to record during March and April. De Wet's orders for a general dispersion had been so thoroughly carried out that the British columns found nothing tangible to grasp, and were occupied almost wholly in police work of a minute though laborious kind. West of the railway nothing at all was done. East of it, Charles Knox's two mounted columns, allotted to the Central District, did a good deal of useful work in the shape of raids on farms, Pilcher operating around Clocolan and the Korannaberg, Thorneycroft around Brandfort. The arrangements originally made for Lyttelton's Southern District were altered considerably during April. Lyttelton went on leave to England in the middle of the month, and handed over the district to General Bruce Hamilton. Colonel Haig also left the district to take up the direction of operations in Cape Colony, and his two columns, those of Lieut.-Colonels W. H. Williams and Byng, were placed under the command of the former officer. In addition to these, Bruce Hamilton had Hickman's force and his own three columns under Lieut.-Colonels Monro, Maxwell and White. With this six-fold mounted force, acting from Dewetsdorp as a centre and aided by some small columns from Cape Colony, he harried the extreme south-eastern corner of his district around the Caledon River and as far south as the Orange. The only incident of any consequence occurred at Rietspruit Farm, near Dewetsdorp, where, on April 10, Monro, after a long

Lyttelton goes on leave and Haig is transferred to Cape Colony.

Bruce Hamilton's operations, April.

chase with 150 men, surrounded and captured 83 Boers under Commandant Bresler.

Rundle in the north-east, Feb.–May.

Rundle, holding Harrismith (Headquarters), Vrede, Bethlehem, and Ficksburg as garrisoned towns, had done very little active work for a long while past, for the good reason that he had been lending his troops in all directions. Harley, with the 17th Brigade, had been occupying Ficksburg and clearing its neighbourhood with a small mounted column under Lieut.-Colonel Firman, and, outside the limits of the district, had been helping to reinforce the Thaba 'Nchu-Ladybrand line. General Barrington Campbell with the 16th Brigade had been assisting General Wynne in the neighbourhood of Standerton. Early in March, when he returned to Rundle's district, he was occupied in relieving Vrede, which Kitchener decided to evacuate. The town, like Hoopstad, which was abandoned at the same period, had been in a state of siege for several months. At the same period several hundreds of Rundle's mounted men and the 2nd East Yorks Regiment were lent to General Hildyard for convoy duty on the Natal frontier, in aid of French's movement in the Eastern Transvaal. In the middle of March, in addition to all these temporary abstractions, Rundle had to send to Kroonstad, for incorporation in Elliot's division, all Campbell's Yeomanry.

Towards the end of March, however, steps were taken to restore his forces to their old strength. Harley's detached force was released; Campbell's brigade and the Vrede garrison were brought round by road and rail to Harrismith; Hildyard sent back the East Yorks Regiment; and new drafts of Yeomanry were sent to Harrismith to receive horses, equipment, and, in the case of a large proportion, the bare elements of training.

Rundle plans a march upon the Brandwater Basin, end of April.

Map, Vol. iv., p. 342.

It was only in the latter part of April that Rundle was able to take the field. He then began an expedition into the Brandwater basin, that cliff-encircled fastness on the Basuto border, in which Prinsloo had been ensnared in July, 1900, but which ever since had been a comfortable refuge for small guerilla bands. The prospect was far from pleasant. It was known that each one of the six passes which give access to the basin would be extremely difficult to force

against stubborn opposition; it was remembered that in 1900 an army corps had been required to complete the trap which closed round Prinsloo. Since that date only one small column, Firman's from Ficksburg, had penetrated the rich valley which lies embosomed among the mountains, and Firman had been withdrawn very quickly. Recently, the British agents in Basutoland had been sending alarmist reports of concentration in the Basin, and of contemplated attacks on Ficksburg. De Wet himself, though as a matter of fact he was 100 miles away to the north, was rumoured to be in the area, organising resistance. Rundle was so much impressed with the necessity for a large force that he first proposed to evacuate both Bethlehem and Ficksburg, use their garrisons as mobile troops in addition to Campbell's Brigade and the old Vrede garrison, and thus employ for the expedition nearly all the troops in his district. Kitchener, objecting to this drastic course, tried to arrange for the co-operation first of Elliot and then of Knox, but this effort to give elasticity to the district system was premature. In the end, Rundle had to do the work alone, using Campbell's reconstituted brigade and a small column under Colonel Reay, composed of troops detached from Bethlehem.* 2,000 infantry, 500 Yeomanry, some of whom had scarcely learned to ride, seven guns, and an enormous ox convoy made up one of the most ineffectual weapons for guerilla warfare which it is possible to imagine. Rundle left Bethlehem on April 29 and entered Retief's Nek on the same evening.

He starts Ap. 29.

Fortunately the fears of strong opposition proved to be groundless. There were barely 700 Boers all told within the Basin, under Rautenbach and Steyn the local commandants. Ammunition was low, hope was not high, and though there was no disposition to surrender, there was none to resist. The one aim of every burgher was to carry away to the mountains all that he could save of his property and stock. While Reay diverged to Snyman's Hoek, where he destroyed

Results of the expedition, May.

* Campbell's Brigade.—Mounted Yeomanry, 500; Tempest's Scouts; 2nd Scots Guards, 498; 2nd East Yorks, 444; 2nd Manchester Regt., 204; 1st Leinsters, 251; 17th Brigade details, 105; 79th Battery, 4 guns; 77th Battery, 2 guns; one 4·7 gun, 1 pom-pom.

a quantity of supplies, Rundle pushed through the deserted valley, scarcely firing a shot, and was at Fouriesburg, the pretty little market town of the Basin, on May 2. Leaving Campbell with sufficient force to hold Fouriesburg, Rundle now divided the rest of his force into two columns under Lieut.-Colonels Romilly and Reay. With these and Harley's brigade from Ficksburg, he endeavoured to operate against the western passes of the Basin; a hopeless endeavour, for the infantry and Yeomanry recruits were impotent in the wild ravines of the Wittebergen. Kitchener, when he wired to Rundle on May 3, "I hope you will hunt bands vigorously," hardly seemed to realise the difficulties under which his lieutenant was labouring. It is not surprising that the operations in the Basin, which lasted during the whole of May, led to the capture of only one burgher and the death of a few others, and that Rundle had to confine himself to the seizure or destruction of supplies, stock, wagons, mills and horses from the well-nigh inexhaustible resources of this rich region. When he finally left the Basin, the Boers had taken heart and made his retreat through the Golden Gate a somewhat perilous operation.

III. Cape Colony

(March–May, 1901)

Situation in Cape Colony, March.

The expulsion of de Wet and Hertzog at the end of February averted a great peril and banished any immediate fear of a general rebellion in Cape Colony. During March there was even a probability that Kritzinger and the other invaders would follow Hertzog's example and return across the border. This was a vain hope. A party of 300, under Van Reenen, did in fact recross the Orange on April 3, but Kritzinger himself remained behind, and with Scheepers, Fouché and Malan, at this time his three most prominent colleagues, continued his mischievous activities.

Troops allotted to the Colony.

While the great hunt had been in progress, and every column that could be spared was flung on the track of de Wet and Hertzog, Kritzinger and his comrades had been

watched merely by Gorringe's Colonial Defence Force. But at the end of the hunt Kitchener sent back such troops as he could spare to take up the pursuit. Major-General Settle resumed the direction of operations, and the mounted columns of Lieut.-Colonels Parsons, Scobell, Henniker, Crabbe, Crewe, Grenfell, De Lisle and Lowe were gradually brought into play; though, as we have already seen, De Lisle's troops and Grenfell's two corps of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts were transferred in April to other quarters.

The scene of warfare.

At this period the scene of warfare, if it can be called warfare, was the mountainous midland district lying round the three towns of Cradock, Graaff Reinet and Middelburg. To the north is the Zuurberg Range, and echeloned towards the south-west are the Sneeuwberg, Koudeveldberg and Camdeboo Mountains. Here the Boer bands not only had an ideal country to work in but were established in and about the very *Knotenpunkt* of the British railway communications.

Kitchener's policy in the Colony.

This latter consideration might have tempted a less cool-headed leader than Kitchener to neglect the rest of the theatre of war until by another overwhelming assemblage of troops he had extirpated the last invader and rebel and cleared his base completely. But Kitchener saw that this would be an uneconomical use of force. One campaign, however drastic, would have been no more than a temporary cure for the evil; while experience had proved the fatal results of relaxing pressure against the Boers in the two new colonies. Moreover, recent events seemed to indicate that the Dutch friends of the Boers, although individually they were joining the invading bands in considerable numbers, would never venture upon a general rising. The sound course, unquestionably, was to provide fully for an unremitting campaign in the Transvaal and Free State; and in the meantime, with local levies and local resources, aided by such Imperial troops as could be spared, to endeavour to rid Cape Colony of the guerilla bands. In principle Kitchener adhered throughout to this policy. But as time went on he was forced to modify his practice and to detach for work in the Colony more and more of his sorely-needed troops and of his ablest officers. Unfortunately the capacity for self-help

shown by the Colony fell much below his expectations. The British colonist, on the average, was inferior in military qualities to the Boer farmer, and among the Dutch disloyalty was rife. The Cape Government, thoroughly patriotic, but distracted, and very naturally distracted, by civil considerations which did not appeal to Kitchener, was slow to go to logical extremes in setting its house in order, and still slower to assume a larger share of the enormous expense exacted by the defence of the Colony. Martial law, that odious but indispensable lever of compulsion in a state so situated, was not yet, from Kitchener's point of view, enforced with sufficient severity. Overt rebellion was punished, often with the penalty of death, but that more insidious evil, assistance of the enemy with intelligence and supplies, was far more difficult to check. The Cape ports, through which a small quantity of practical help may have filtered to the rebel bands, were still free from martial law.

Capacity for self-help shown by the Colony.

Meeting with sympathy and refreshment wherever they went, reinforced by a slender but steady stream of young and adventurous recruits, well-mounted * and well-armed—often at the expense of the ill-drilled levies which crossed their path—the invading bands were almost unapproachable. Even the strategical advantage of the railways had now in a great degree to be sacrificed to the higher necessity of keeping the lines clear for their normal work of supplying and reinforcing the army in the Transvaal and Free State. Intelligence was as bad for the British as it was good for the rebels. The transitional phase in the mounted branch of the army told as much here as elsewhere. Lastly, the local control of columns presented more difficulties than anywhere on the field of war. Some master-hand was needed, and that hand was absent. With all these disadvantages, clumsy or careless partisans might have been run to earth; but

The unequal conditions of warfare.

* This in spite of the instructions issued as far back as December, 1900, that in the disturbed districts no horses were to be left on farms except such as could be adequately guarded. In four months 25,000 were commandeered under these instructions, and on April 16 Kitchener was able to promulgate the order that the columns operating in the Colony were to rely solely on local remounts. Lt.-Col. Beauchamp Doran took over the Remount Depôt in Cape Colony and did the work very well.

Kritzinger, Scheepers, Fouché and Malan were exceptionally bold and clever leaders, and others practised in their school who learnt to equal their masters.

The operations, first phase, end of March.

In the sporadic hostilities of March and April, three phases may be distinguished. The first was a northward movement in March, led by Kritzinger, and culminating early in April in the retirement of Van Reenen and 300 men across the Orange at Odendal Stroom, although on the hither side six columns had been assembled to intercept him, and three, under Bruce Hamilton, on the farther side. Kritzinger himself, with another 300, doubled back from a point near Steynsburg, and made for the country between Tarkastad and Cradock.

Second phase, first half of April.

The main interest now shifts to the mountainous region between Graaff Reinet and Beaufort West, where Scheepers, Fouché and Malan, with about 800 men, who had taken no part in the northward movement, were working, sometimes in concert, sometimes independently. In March all three had been in collision at one time or another with the columns of Parsons, Scobell and Grenfell, but never on terms satisfactory to the British. Early in April, the three leaders having foregathered in the Camdeboo Mountains between Aberdeen and Graaff Reinet, Settle endeavoured to deal with them by driving the mountains from west to east with the columns of Grenfell and Scobell, while mounted men from Aberdeen and Graaff Reinet watched the eastern exits.

Action of Zeekoegat, Apr. 6.

The plan miscarried, and the upshot was that on April 6 Scheepers overwhelmed and captured the Graaff Reinet detachment of 75 men (5th Lancers and I.Y.) at Zeekoegat, where they had been placed, owing to a misapprehension of his orders, by the Commandant of Aberdeen.

Third phase, latter half of April, and first half of May.

In the middle of April the third phase begins. Settle was transferred to the western part of the colony to organize resistance to some rebel bands under Maritz and Conroy, and Colonel Douglas Haig was brought down from the Free State to direct the columns in the midlands.* Two new

* At this time, also, Major-General Hector MacDonald gave up the command at Aliwal North and proceeded to India. He was succeeded by Major-General Fitzroy Hart, who latterly had been superintending the L. of C. Bloemfontein-Norvals Pont. From Aliwal North three small

tendencies now declared themselves. Scheepers and Malan, tiring of the Camdeboo Mountains, travelled east, tracked by Scobell and Henniker, to the neighbourhood of Pearston, and at the beginnning of May penetrating still further eastward, crossed the Great Fish River and established themselves in the Baviaansberg, where for the present we may leave them. Fouché, meanwhile, had left his two comrades and joined Kritzinger, who at this time had taken alarm at the growing network of columns and had determined to follow Van Reenen's example and to leave Cape Colony for a while. Proceeding leisurely northwards, and capturing a supply-train near Molteno, he crossed the Orange close to Bethulie on April 29; Fouché with a few followers deciding at the eleventh hour to remain behind. With Kritzinger's departure the situation began to look more hopeful; but the improvement was only temporary. Small but growing bands, too numerous to mention, were scattered all over the midlands, and Kritzinger, having rested and refitted in the Rouxville district, once more evaded Bruce Hamilton, and by the middle of May was back in his old haunts. With him came Van Reenen and many of the men who had crossed the Orange early in April. At the beginning of winter, therefore, the situation was as bad as ever.

Kritzinger leaves the Colony, Ap. 29.

But returns in the middle of May.

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columns under Colonel Herbert, Major Moore (Connaught Rangers), and Major Murray (Lovat's Scouts) were directed during March and April to work in concert with Bruce Hamilton's columns between the Orange and Caledon, and also independently on the left bank of the Orange. Major-General Inigo Jones retained the command at Naauwpoort.

CHAPTER X

KITCHENER AND THE GUERILLA WAR

(May 1901)

Object of the chapter: to describe the situation in May 1901 and Kitchener's way of dealing with the guerilla war.

In Chapter III. an endeavour was made to sketch, in general terms, the problem before Kitchener when he first assumed the command, and the measures which he first took to meet it. After five crowded months, in which many emergencies had been overcome, many new tendencies had declared themselves and extensive changes had been made in the composition of the army, it is time to review the progress made and to re-state the problem. The first step is to compare the strength and resources of the two combatants.

The new mounted army complete, May.

In May, 1901, the new mounted army which Kitchener had appealed for in December, 1900, was practically complete.* During the first four months of the new year a steady stream of reinforcements, reaching its greatest volume in March, and amounting altogether to 37,000 men, had been pouring into South Africa, while large levies had been raised within the sub-continent itself.

Composition and strength.

Including the two regiments sent out in January, the Cavalry now stood at a figure of 14,000. The Mounted Infantry, including 3,600 men trained at Aldershot, the rest having been drawn mainly from infantry regiments at the front, now consisted of 27 battalions with a strength of about 12,000, and this figure was still rising. The South African Constabulary stood at 7,500, and the second contingent of Imperial Yeomanry, 17,000 strong, had been landed in South Africa by the end of April. The first contingent, reduced by this time to a bare third of its original size, still remained at the front, but in the course of June and July it was wholly withdrawn. The original contingents from Canada and

* See chap. iii., pp. 78–85.

Australasia had left the seat of war. Though Canada, save in contributing men to the S.A.C. and Scottish Horse, had done nothing to replace hers,* the Australasian Colonies, by the end of May, had dispatched 5,000 men and were preparing to dispatch more. Finally, some 24,000 irregulars raised in South Africa itself, were enrolled in active corps, whether old or new, and over and above these numbers District Mounted Troops and Town Guards had been enrolled for local defence in Cape Colony. Excluding this local militia and the old Yeomanry, we find that Kitchener had at his disposal an active mounted force of about 80,000 officers and men, of whom about three-eighths were colonials.

See Appendices.

This force, though it possessed many excellent qualities, was far from being a perfect weapon. Of its merits and defects little need now be added to the remarks made in Chapter III. Among the regulars marked progress had been made during the last five months, but it was greater, relatively, in the improvised Mounted Infantry than in the Cavalry. As a source of inspiration and dashing leadership the latter arm continued to disappoint. Of the volunteers the greater part was unseasoned and a considerable proportion had little or no training. The South African Constabulary, which, with its peculiar advantages, had obtained a finer class of recruit than any other volunteer or irregular body, was not, as we hinted in Chapter III., used to the best advantage. The idea that its functions, even in time of war, must be those of police, lived on, so that, instead of being employed for the active pursuit of the enemy, it was confined to certain useful, but semi-passive duties, which will be described in their proper place. The new Yeomanry, through no fault of their own, as yet were only the raw material for soldiers. Generally speaking, in tactical skill, riding, skirmishing and marksmanship, the British standard of excellence was considerably below that of the Boers.

Backward in training.

Horses were now being imported into South Africa at the rate of 10,000 a month; many thousands were commandeered in Cape Colony, and large numbers were captured

Horses.

* The only Canadian troops now in South Africa were Ross's Canadian Scouts, formed locally, and a battery of artillery.

on the veld. Even this enormous supply was insufficient. Kitchener had failed to bestow the attention it deserved upon this important matter. Ground lost was never wholly regained. Quantities of animals were still thrown prematurely into the field, unfit and unacclimatised, quickly to succumb to the rigours of campaigning. The sickening waste of horseflesh which ensued was partly, of course, a corollary to the policy of tossing half-trained horsemen into mobile columns; but there was also much administrative blundering and much inexcusable neglect in the field. The remount camps and rest camps were not properly inspected, and it was not until November that Kitchener took effectual steps to remedy this defect. At the same time it is but fair to say that these camps—so constant and pressing were the demands for mounts—were never given a fair chance of becoming efficient and serviceable. In the field, even when the troops had become veterans, the consumption of horses was far too great. The regular troops were the best horse-masters and the colonials the worst, but the standard throughout was not high. At one time, in imitation of the Boer practice, Kitchener tried the experiment of furnishing columns with a quantity of spare horses. The result was only to encourage waste.

The whole army in May 1901.

In addition to the mounted riflemen there were, in round numbers, 85,000 Regular Infantry in South Africa, 20,000 Militia,* 13,000 gunners,† and 4,000 Engineers. The R.A.M.C., A.S.C., and other auxiliary classes accounted for 11,500, and, if in the final estimate we include the local defence forces of Cape Colony, we find that the army in South Africa at this period reached a grand total of nearly 240,000, with a hundred heavy guns, 420 horse and field-guns, and 60 pom-poms.‡

Use made of surrendered Boers.

The army was now deriving much informal assistance from two alien sources, Boer and native. Surrendered Boers had for some time past been taking an active part in assisting British operations. Several hundred "Burgher Police," as

* Nine battalions were embodied and sent out in April, May, and June, relieving a similar number of battalions in South Africa.

† Including about 700 Colonials and 700 Militia.

‡ The figures given throughout are the full nominal figures. The net

they were then called, were associated with the South African Constabulary in maintaining a protected area round Bloemfontein, to which further allusion will be made. But it was in the capacity of scouts and spies that the burghers were most useful. It must be borne in mind that defection had not yet assumed any formal or recognised character. The influential men among those who had surrendered in the winter of 1900, and had taken the oath of allegiance—men such as Piet de Wet in the Free State and General Andries Cronje in the Transvaal—still held aloof from any active participation in the war. For the present (apart from the Bloemfontein burghers) defection merely represented leakage from the lower class of Boers, *bywoners* or landless men, who had no stake in the country and held the ties of the commando very lightly.

Use made of natives.

Increasing use was being made of the native population for miscellaneous purposes directly or indirectly connected with the war. As transport-drivers, cattle-guards, labourers, and so on, unarmed natives had for long been employed, and continued to be employed, in large numbers. It was now becoming the practice to arm natives for directly military

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fighting strength was a very fluctuating quantity. The following is the official state for a somewhat later date, viz., June 19, 1901:—

EFFECTIVE FIGHTING STRENGTH ON JUNE 19, 1901

(Exclusive of sick, irregular hospital orderlies, Cape Colony D.M.T. and Town Guards, and S.A. Constabulary.)

Cavalry	10,430
M.I.	12,677
I.Y.	13,970
Over-sea Colonials	5,561
S.A. Irregulars	16,712
Colonial Defence Force	3,577
R.A. (including Militia and Colonials)	11,911
Engineers	3,822
Infantry, Regular	62,000
„ Militia	16,000
„ Volunteer	3,742
Non-combatants (R.A.M.C., A.S.C., A. Ord., Civil Surgeons, etc.)	3,577
Total	163,979

purposes. In all cases the original motive was that of supplying means of self-defence against an enemy who attached very little value to the life of a Kaffir. On broad grounds of policy nobody will deny that, in a war between two white races, destined in the future to live side by side in the midst of a vast coloured population, natives should be armed only in case of the last necessity. This necessity can be clearly shown in the case of the predominantly native districts of Cape Colony, which were continually threatened with invasion and spoliation, and where one or two causeless barbarities were perpetrated by the Boers. In the north-western districts, where the white population was very sparse, half-caste Bastards and Cape Boys were enrolled in considerable numbers for local defence. In the native district of Herschel, a favourite point for invasion, and in a few other instances, natives were permitted to form themselves into defensive bands. Basutoland naturally held itself ready to resist invasion. The Zululand Police were most loyal and useful. Travelling beyond these cases we reach debatable ground. Without any conscious reference to principle, but merely with the same motive of supplying means of self-defence, it became the habit, in most parts of the theatre of war, to give a rifle to a native engaged on any dangerous service. The most useful of such services was that of intelligence. As time went most columns came to be accompanied by parties of armed native scouts, who did most valuable service; so valuable, indeed, that in one limited quarter, under exceptionally able direction, something like a tactical revolution was carried into effect, with not unimportant results. It would be an abuse of terms to describe these scouts as non-combatants. Nor were night-watchmen on block-house lines (for this was another instance) any less truly combatants than the soldiers within the block-houses. We do not intend to argue the question at length, but it is one that well deserves serious scrutiny. The only justification was sheer military necessity, and this was the answer given to the protests of the Boer leaders. It is hard, in view of the immense difficulties which faced the British in South Africa, to pass an unreserved condemnation upon

the practice; but it is necessary to insist that a nation which is compelled to draw upon such sources to supply its military needs, incurs risks which are none the less real because they are not immediately apparent.

Boer cruelty to natives.

Although the Boer view of natives was different from, and repugnant to, the traditionally humane British view, it did recognise the necessity of maintaining white prestige. Exasperated by the use made of armed native scouts, they went to extremes, not only refusing quarter to such as fell into their hands, but in some few cases murdering in cold blood unarmed natives who were suspected of betraying them. These pitiless reprisals and the practice which gave rise to them were equally bad omens for the future of South Africa. There was no question, of course, of indiscriminate rapine or brutality. The Boers needed the goodwill of the natives as much as the British; partly for purposes of intelligence, but chiefly, as we shall see later, for purposes of commissariat.

The Boer strength and efficiency in May 1901.

The difficulty of estimating the effective Boer strength was as great as ever. With allowance made for surrenders, captures and deaths since the beginning of Kitchener's *régime*, there were still at large about 44,000 men and lads; but many of these were incapable of taking the field; nor were there ever at one time more than 13,000 in fighting trim and fighting fettle. Two opposite processes were at work, a sifting process and a moulding process, corresponding to the different effects produced by the stress of war on individual characters. Outside the existing nucleus of sturdy fighters there was a large class of burghers whose course was undecided. While this class was constantly lessened by surrenders, under slight pressure or even without pressure, at the same time a counter-current was setting in the other direction. Weak men under the same pressure became strong; some of the weakest, indeed, became the strongest. Casualties and captures by direct force of arms were comparatively few; and thus the effective nucleus was maintained at a fairly high level. This nucleus, which was, or should have been, the true objective of the British arms, was growing in military proficiency. Timid and lethargic leaders had been replaced by young men, chosen expressly for daring and

capacity in the field. Now that there was no longer any need or opportunity for fighting behind intrenchments, tactical discipline had greatly improved and continued to improve. Without this discipline, the Boers, under the new conditions, would have been impotent; with it they obtained that power of vigorous offence, which received such signal expression in the months of December and January. Then it generally took the form of assaults on fortified posts and night attacks on columns, but the reader will remember a significant incident at Geduld, in the Western Transvaal, during the month of March,* when, in broad daylight, De la Rey carried out a charge, his burghers firing from the saddle. This was the forerunner of tactics which were to become very formidable. Lastly, the commando organisation and the national organisation continued to exist unimpaired.

Depopulation.

Meanwhile, in a civil sense, the vast battle-ground was being slowly depopulated, the ring cleared, so to speak, for the two combatants, by the deliberate action of the stronger. Farm after farm was being visited and its non-combatants transported to centres where they were fed and educated by their enemies. In May there were in round numbers 77,000 white persons in the concentration camps and 21,000 coloured people. The figures rose by leaps and bounds during the following months, reaching their highest level, 118,000 and 43,000 respectively, in October. In March the Transvaal and Free State camps had passed from the control of the military administration, to which they had been a well-nigh intolerable burden, to that of the civil power; but the Natal camps were not transferred until November. The full extent of embarrassment caused by the policy of depopulation was now clearly visible. The burghers had been encouraged to continue their armed resistance, and at the same time, owing to the condition of the camps, were able to make political use in England and Europe of the sufferings of their women and children. In part these complaints were insincere, for it is abundantly clear that they were heartily glad to be relieved of the responsibility for the maintenance of their families, and would not, on any account,

The concentration camps from May onwards.

* See chap. ix., p. 224.

have resumed the burden. But in part, as we pointed out in Chapter IV., the complaints were well-grounded. Growing at a rapid rate, without adequate provision for their growth or prudent allowance for the helplessness and ignorance of their occupants, some of the camps, humane as their intention was, had fallen into a far from satisfactory state. The death-rate, especially among children, was terribly high. In May the rate for the whole of the white population was about 120 per thousand per annum, and for children, who died principally of measles, which was epidemic in all the camps, this rate was vastly exceeded. During the early months of 1901 the evil grew without much general recognition, but in June, in consequence of the researches and reports of Miss Emily Hobhouse, who had long been labouring to relieve the distress, considerable agitation was caused in England. Miss Hobhouse was not altogether politic or temperate in presenting her case; hence a bitter controversy of a semi-political character, in which the true issue was lost under heated polemics concerning British humanity in the war. The truth was that while the concentration system caused far less misery and loss than would have been suffered had the families remained on the veld, the way in which it was carried out was open to much criticism. This eventually was recognised. A Commission of ladies, under the presidency of Mrs. Fawcett, was appointed by the War Office and left England in July. In a tour of inspection extending over four months they examined all the camps, initiated many valuable reforms, and in their report* set forth dispassionately the causes of the high death-rate, some of which were beyond the control of the most perfect organisation, and the strenuous efforts which had been made by the scanty staff of over-worked officials to cope with a task beyond their powers. From October onwards the condition of the camps steadily improved. The general death-rate, which by that time had risen to 344, fell to 69 in February of the following year. Doctors and trained nurses were sent out in large numbers and steps were taken to reduce the camps in size and increase them in

The Commission of Ladies, July 1901.

* Cd. 893.

number. Nor should we omit to mention the excellent work done in the education of the children. This work had been set on foot by Milner as soon as the camps were established, and under the able superintendence of Mr. Sargant, who in February 1901 became Commissioner of Education for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, was carried to great perfection. In October 1901 it was calculated that two-thirds of the children of school age were on the school roll, besides a great number of adults. To sum up, if we cannot but regret the early errors in the administration of the camps, we must admit that their maintenance in the midst of a great war, under conditions whose difficulty can scarcely be exaggerated, was a colossal undertaking carried out on the whole with wonderful success.

Devastation.

Hand in hand with depopulation went devastation. This was a well-nigh interminable process. Cattle and sheep were captured by tens of thousands; grain past computation was seized or destroyed; standing crops were burnt; mills and farm-buildings were gutted; but to reduce the diminishing forces of the enemy to actual scarcity was, in spite of all this, a result that had scarcely begun to be visible. Though all the minor luxuries of life were by this time denied them, or were only to be obtained by the capture of a British convoy, meat and mealies (ground by small portable mills) were plentiful among the burghers. Coffee and sugar were lacking, but for the former good substitutes were used, made from mealies, dried peaches, sweet potatoes, rye and other ingredients, and sometimes from the roots of certain trees. When salt failed, new salt-pans were exploited, while many commandos went without it and thrived none the less. In this matter of food it is important to remember that when their own resources became inadequate the Boers were able to fall back on the native kraals, which were not included in the scheme of devastation. Hence the attitude of the natives towards the Boers became a more and more important factor as time went on. Treated well and paid fairly the natives in some districts remained friendly to the Boers till the end. Treated badly they began to evince a sullen hostility, which eventually

Condition of the commandos in May 1901.

Food.

caused the Boer contempt to be tempered by fear. Boots and clothing were beginning to be a serious problem. All sources of ready-made clothing having failed, every sort of expedient was improvised to supply the want. The art, long dead, of spinning wool was revived by the women still left on the field; spinning-wheels being fabricated from old sewing-machines and fruit-peelers. Sheepskin jackets were often worn. Coats and breeches were made of or patched with leather, until the tanning apparatus in its turn had been destroyed, and finally, when all such expedients proved insufficient, the practice of wearing uniforms stripped from British prisoners—a practice nominally forbidden by the leaders, but systematically winked at—came into general use. Exasperating and sometimes disastrous as was this practice to British troops, besides being fundamentally opposed to the rules of regular war, it is difficult in the case of the Boers, a peasant population in arms, without any uniform of their own, to condemn it by ordinary standards when employed as a measure of sheer necessity. In bad cases of wilful deception, Boers were sometimes shot for wearing our uniform; but Kitchener, as a general rule, took a lenient view of the offence. It must be borne in mind that the slouch hat, the one characteristic feature of the Boer garb and easily recognisable at great distances, had been adopted by the British authorities themselves.

Clothes.

So much for the necessities of life. In regard to munitions of war it might be supposed that, after eighteen months of hostilities and the loss of all their arsenals, depôts and railways, the Boers would be suffering severely from lack of rifle ammunition. They did in fact suffer, but not very severely. Mauser cartridges, it is true, were scarce in some districts, in spite of the large stores which had been buried or hidden for future use in the spring of 1900 and which were not yet exhausted. The Transvaal, moreover, until April 1901, had had Pietersburg to draw on, and as late as November, when Kitchener put a stop to the traffic, was smuggling small quantities through Delagoa Bay. But the principal source of replenishment all over the field of war was from the British themselves. Thanks

Rifle ammunition.

to the large number of prisoners and convoys captured, Lee-Metford rifles and ammunition were already common enough among the Boers. As Mauser ammunition grew more scarce and captures of small and occasionally of large parties of men continued, the British weapon became more and more popular, until towards the end of the war the Boer forces were almost entirely re-armed with it. This was one of the consequences of pitting half-trained men against seasoned fighters; for the former, from sheer inexperience, were constantly supplying the latter with clothing and warlike stores. On the British side, moreover, there was a great deal of sheer wastefulness, especially among the raw troops, who were in the habit of leaving their bivouacs littered with unused cartridges. To the Boers, who husbanded every round, such gleanings were of priceless value.

Artillery.

While the Boers had a sufficiency of rifles and ammunition, they had lost almost all of their artillery, including the guns originally captured from the British. In March and April alone no less than twenty-four guns * and nine Maxims had been taken from them or found destroyed. The Boers, indeed, had been taking less and less trouble to preserve their artillery, for which they had no reserves of ammunition and no facilities for repairs. To drag about worn-out pieces with a scanty supply of often imperfect ammunition was to hamper their mobility to no good purpose. The best leaders had already realised what the British leaders were far too slow to realise, that in the perfected guerilla tactics of the future guns would count for little, and rapidity, stratagem, and a bold use of the rifle for much. On the other hand, apart from the tactical value of guns, there was a reason which rendered it imperative to deprive the Boers of artillery. This was the invention of the blockhouse.

The blockhouse first appeared on the railway.

It will be remembered that one of the first reforms undertaken by Kitchener when he assumed command in

* Two Long Toms; one 4·7 (British); four 15-prs. (British); three 12-prs. (British); one 9-pr. Krupp; one 80-mm. Krupp; one 75-mm. Krupp; one 1-pr. Q.F. Krupp; eight pom-poms: one Maxim-Nordenfelt.

South Africa was the strengthening of the railways. At that time the defences of the lines were of the simplest description, consisting almost wholly of open trenches at stations, bridges, and culverts, while the line itself was patrolled by small parties of mounted men. In laying out these trench-defences, the principal object kept in view was to render them inconspicuous and thus immune from artillery fire. The system required enormous numbers of men both for patrol work and for manning the long lines of trenches, and from June, 1900, when Christiaan De Wet initiated his brilliant raids on the railway, proved to be inefficient as well as wasteful. The trenches were often badly laid out and so constructed as to afford far too little cover, while the patrols were weak and easily eluded. When Kitchener took command, the Boers had begun to harass the railway communications with a persistence and daring hitherto unknown. Raids in force on garrisoned posts were more frequent than ever, and the art of wrecking trains, destroying bridges and telegraph wires and damaging the permanent way, was studied and practised methodically by regular gangs told off for the purpose. December 1900 and January and February 1901 were the worst months, and the worst section of line was that from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay, where Viljoen's satellites, Jack Hindon and Karl Trichard, the two most accomplished experts in the art, carried out their operations. As late as April, we may remind the reader, a train carrying troops to a strategic centre had been wrecked at a critical moment. It was clear that some form of permanent or semi-permanent defence must be adopted, if security was to be gained and the railway guards reduced. Early in January, accordingly, the first blockhouses were constructed. By this time the Boers had lost so much of their artillery that invulnerability from shell-fire was no longer an object to be aimed at. All defences consisting of mere open trenches were gradually abolished and their place taken by closed works, giving a wide field of fire and protected from assault by barbed wire entanglements and other obstacles. Some of these works, those, for instance, at important bridges, were substantial stone forts, but the majority

The first blockhouses, Jan., 1901.

were small octagonal structures made of two skins of corrugated iron nailed on to wooden frames, the space between being filled up with gravel and earth. Loopholes were formed by steel plates drilled in the centre and placed either on wooden cases which rested on the gravel or on wooden cross-pieces. Comparatively simple as these structures were, they were nevertheless both too expensive and too elaborate. They needed regular foundations; the loopholes were complicated and inefficient; and the rate of construction, involving much transport and much expert assistance, was slow.

An improved form of blockhouse, Feb., 1901.

In February, however, Major Rice, R.E., worked out the design of a blockhouse which showed great improvements in all these particulars. It was still octagonal in form, and consisted, as before, of two skins of corrugated iron; but these skins were only 4½ inches apart, and consequently required only one wooden frame, to which both skins were nailed, with an interior filling of hard shingle. Experience proved that this was sufficient to keep out a bullet. No foundation was required and no post-holes for the woodwork. The blockhouse stood on a platform of stone or earth, and was provided with a suitable roof, which added greatly to the comfort and health of the men. The reduction in the thickness of the walls gave facilities for a simpler and more effective loophole, formed of sheet iron in the shape of a double funnel with the neck in the middle of the wall.

The final and standard form of blockhouse, March, 1901.

Each blockhouse was furnished with a small cylindrical water-tank of corrugated iron, and it was in the making of these tanks, the iron for which had to be rolled in a machine to give it the proper curve, that the idea of the circular blockhouse occurred to Major Rice. This proved to be the simplest and cheapest variety of all and became eventually the standard pattern. It consisted of two cylinders of corrugated iron, without any woodwork, the annular space between the cylinders being packed with shingle, and the whole roofed and loopholed as before. Blockhouses of this type were found to be more durable than those of the octagonal form, which were liable to bulge; they were very cheap, costing only £16 when made by the R.E., and from

£50 to £70 when let out to contract; they required little material and little transport, could be rapidly turned out from central factories and placed in position with a *minimum* of skilled labour. As defensive works they were very successful. Until they were invented, progress in the railway defences was slow and unmethodical, but with their advent work advanced with rapid strides. From March onwards the trains, the permanent way and the telegraph wires became more and more secure, and in May, the period we are now considering, although the Cape railways had not yet been dealt with, a great extent of the lines in the Transvaal and Free State was in a thorough state of defence. Mounted patrols were gradually abolished and the work of patrolling entrusted to the blockhouse garrisons and to armoured trains, whose number was increased and whose functions were systematised. Interruptions and outrages still occurred occasionally, but the nuisance was growing negligible.

The new idea of converting a railway into a barrier.

Meanwhile a new idea, or, to be more accurate, an old idea in a new form, was growing up. Originally the function of the blockhouse was to guard the railway from molestation; it was now expected to serve the additional purpose of converting the railway into a barrier against the free passage of the enemy. The simple circular blockhouse, so cheaply and rapidly multiplied, immensely facilitated this design. Planted at first only at stations, bridges, culverts, important cuttings and curves—at the points, in fact, which experience had proved to be most vulnerable—blockhouses came to be established at regular intervals of about a mile and a half down the whole extent of a line. This interval was steadily lessened. Ultimately it became as small as 400 yards on the Delagoa line and was reduced even to 200 yards on some portions of the Cape railways. A continuous fencing of barbed wire ran along the line; elaborate entanglements surrounded each blockhouse, and the telephone linked up the whole system. A somewhat later development was a deep trench bordering the line of barbed wire and running to within 100 yards of each blockhouse. But the perfection of the system was a long process. At present the railway lines, regarded as barriers,

were far from effective. The usual garrison for a blockhouse —six infantrymen and one N.C.O., together with three or four natives for sentry work at night—was too small to prevent crossings by the enemy. It is true that small parties of Boers with no very urgent object in view and no very determined spirit were often turned back. Wagons could very rarely cross. But it was found impossible to prevent determined bodies of Boers from cutting the wires and forcing a passage at night. Clever devices without number were employed for giving an alarm, should the wires be tampered with, but the Boers studied anti-blockhouse tactics with equal diligence and ingenuity, and if they really wanted to cross a railway, were generally able, in the absence of superior force, to do so with little loss.

The Thaba 'Nchu-Ladybrand cordon of posts.

Hitherto blockhouses proper had been confined to the railways. But in one instance a somewhat analogous system of defence had been applied to a road. In the middle of 1900, a cordon of small posts, to which frequent allusion has been made, had been established between Bloemfontein and the Basuto border, by way of Thaba 'Nchu and Ladybrand. These posts had little in common with the new railway blockhouses, but were small intrenched forts, garrisoned by 40 or 50 men, and planted several miles apart at points of strategic value. Here, too, the original object had been to protect a line of communication, namely, the main road from the Free State capital to Basutoland. Later, the secondary aim had grown up of obstructing the passage of Boers through the passes which connected the north-eastern and the south-eastern districts of the Free State. For the former purpose the posts had considerable value; but as a barrier the cordon was a failure. De Wet had crossed and recrossed it safely in his raid to the Orange in December 1900, and again in his invasion of Cape Colony in February 1901. Lyttelton's ten driving columns, at the end of March, had found it ineffective. Kitchener, nevertheless, decided to extend the cordon to the westward of Bloemfontein. In May, the period we have now reached, the work had just been entrusted to the South African Constabulary, as one of its first tasks.

Extended westward by the S.A.C., May, 1901.

In this westerly extension the system was more elaborate, and the aims in view wider. To "E" Division of the S.A.C., under Colonel Ridley, and soon afterwards, when he was incapacitated by sickness, under Major Pack Beresford, was allotted, first, the area round Bloemfontein to a radius of 25 miles; second, the tract of country between the Riet and the Modder rivers, bounded on the west by the Kimberley line, and on the east by the Pretoria line. In the first case Kitchener's aim—an aim he steadily pursued in both new colonies—was to form a protected area around the capital so as to encourage as far as possible the resumption of civil life. In the Transvaal, where the industrial interests at stake were vastly more important, the task was longer and more difficult and was not approached in earnest until two months later; but under Beresford's direction the protection of Bloemfontein was soon assured by an almost impenetrable screen of posts manned largely by surrendered farmers. With regard to the belt of country between the Riet and the Modder, the task set before the Police embodied a wholly new conception. Their cordon of posts, besides being intended to secure a safe line of road-communication between the two trunk railways and to constitute a barrier between the Boers of the north and the south, was meant to serve as a base for small operations in the surrounding country; for clearing farms, removing Boer families, destroying crops, capturing stock and expelling bands of the enemy. Thus to purely passive functions an active function was added. Nor was the cordon to remain stationary. As soon as one belt was cleared, the posts were to be pushed northward and other belts successively cleared.

Two functions, passive and active.

Inset to Blockhouse Map, end of Chapter xiv.

The suggestion has been made, and deserves a brief notice, that this was the right way to deal with the whole theatre of war, to the exclusion of mobile columns. There could be no greater fallacy. The "area system," as the methods applied by the Police came afterwards to be called, though it facilitated systematic devastation and led to the capture, piecemeal, of a great number of Boers, was infinitely slow and had very little moral effect on the best fighting men, who simply moved on to less harassed areas. It was no more

Inadequacy of the "area" system.

than a useful adjunct to the campaign and it was scarcely the most fruitful field of action for the fine material represented by the S.A.C. On the other hand, the ideas originally embodied both in the cordon of posts crossing the open veld and on the blockhouse line proper, hitherto confined solely to the railways, continued strongly to influence British military thought. As yet no definite scheme had been evolved, but the current of events was setting steadily towards the system which ultimately triumphed. What was the nature of this current?

The current of events. (1) The double objective.

Reviewing the operations of the last four months and placing in a separate category those in the Cape Colony, where the conditions were peculiar, we find that everywhere else certain lasting tendencies had been established. In the first place, while the mobile column had maintained its place as the primary instrument of war, the mobile column had been given two distinct objectives—the enemy and the property and families of the enemy. While it can scarcely be said that to strike at both successfully was absolutely impossible, commanders would have been more than human had they not confused the two aims and thought more about the easier task of devastation and deportation than about the extremely difficult task of bringing to battle such an agile and elusive enemy as the Boer. Nor was it realised, even in the highest quarters, what a colossal labour was involved in reducing the commandos to starvation. An enemy less dependent on property than the Boer can scarcely be imagined; nor was there ever an enemy over whom it was more urgently necessary to gain that decisive moral ascendency which defeat in battle alone can give.

2) The Drive.

The second tendency may be summed up in the word "drive." French's great movement determined the standard type of operation. Although much energetic and valuable work was still to be done by single roving columns, it had become the general rule to form large groups to sweep defined areas just as fish are netted or game driven. The latter analogy, trite as it has become, can scarcely be improved upon. So apposite was it that the terminology of the grouse-moor was coming into common use, and the word

"drive" was beginning to be applied to all big combined operations, as opposed to those of single columns. In the reality and in the image, whether the quarry be men or game, the distinction between the two methods is fundamental and the motives governing the choice between them are the same. In the one case, an individual column-commander or sportsman relies on his own superior quickness and cunning; in the other, the game being too wild and wary for such tactics, success is sought in weight of numbers and perfect organisation. The beaters, the guns, the butts, the "stops" disposed on either flank to check evasion and keep the birds straight, all had their analogues in the military drive. But in one important particular the analogy of the grouse-drive, the most familiar analogy to those engaged in the operation, fails, and a closer parallel is afforded by a drive of dangerous game. For the Boers—witness Lake Chrissie—could retaliate sharply on their pursuers. As we have endeavoured to show in preceding chapters, the drive, as yet, was very far from effectual; far less effectual, indeed, than the results of the early experiments led the British to believe. Strategically impressive, it was destitute of tactical cohesion and tactical vigour.

(3) Centralisation.

The third tendency was towards centralisation. The responsibility delegated to leaders in the field, whether column-commanders or group-commanders, was steadily diminishing, while the controlling influence exercised by headquarters over even the most distant operations was steadily growing. Among the senior commanders, French, who was soon to receive entire control in Cape Colony, was a conspicuous exception. Methuen, in his remote western sphere, enjoyed a considerable measure of liberty; Plumer, too, was sometimes an exception. But the others, such as Blood, C. Knox, Elliot, Bruce Hamilton, Rundle, Willson, all of whom controlled large groups of columns at the present period, had but a very limited independence. For practical purposes the column was now the unit, and the relation between the column and headquarters was intimate and often direct.

Want of aggressive impulse.

These three closely-associated tendencies, set off, but not neutralised by numberless small instances of daring and ingenuity on the part of all ranks, had given a mechanical

and statistical character to the war. Cut and dried schemes were distributed and executed. The results, largely consisting of farm property and the weaker sort of burgher, were tabulated in weekly returns, which, while they breathed a specious air of progress, provided no reliable test of the Boer capacity for resistance. What the operations lacked was aggressive impulse, permeating the army from the bottom to the top and directed with a clear and unflinching purpose against the grand fortress of Boer strength, the persons of the fighting burghers. In one quarter alone, Cape Colony, where devastation and deportation had no place, was the true objective recognised and pursued.

Fundamental causes—national temperament.

It is easier to state this weakness than to analyse its causes. Before attempting to estimate Kitchener's influence as Commander-in-chief, it is necessary to set forth the fundamental obstacles with which he had to contend. In the first place the weakness, though it was growing more apparent, was by no means new. In this and preceding volumes it has been pointed out that the successes which led the British to Pretoria all lacked completeness. The country was conquered, but not the people. And if the aggressive impulse which is content with nothing but a decisive victory at whatever cost was deficient during a period when the early disasters of the war had aroused the whole empire to a pitch of patriotic fervour, it is no wonder that it was deficient in the last stages of the war, when the glamour and glory of the enterprise had faded and the cause of the quarrel had been well-nigh forgotten. No deep racial antipathy—that potent stimulus in war—actuated the army. Among the Boer chiefs opposed to it there was hardly a name which recalled the bitter political antagonisms from which the war had sprung; hardly a name associated with corruption or oppression, or even with racial ambition. While the national resolve to conquer, as reflected in the army, remained immutable, the actual process of subjugating the last residue of these obstinate patriots, who improved on nearer acquaintance, was not one which could be expected to excite any remarkable enthusiasm. In war, such a consideration, though it cannot be formulated in strict military terms, is a factor of pro-

found importance. Nor, as a purely military problem, did the guerilla war excite widespread ardour among British leaders. The idea that the war had ended with the flight of President Kruger had taken deep root; the awakening, even under Kitchener's stimulating energy, was slow. Honours had been distributed with a lavish hand. Reputations had been made, and were not to be lightly staked in petty hostilities of a seemingly thankless order, involving many chances of disaster and few of brilliant success. Reverses, it must be remembered, were magnified to an excessive degree by public opinion, and not without some excuse; for the public, dimly instructed as to the character of the guerilla war, passed from mood to mood, now encouraged by rosy reports of progress, now bewildered and depressed by the news that the "banditti," as some newspapers absurdly called them, had won a fight which showed that they possessed discipline and skill of a high order. In South Africa, therefore, caution was in the air; willingness to take risks and responsibility, and, if necessary, to incur considerable losses, was rare. Nor can the conclusion be avoided that there was a real dearth of aptitude for guerilla war. These facts powerfully favoured centralisation and the mechanical style of operating.

Want of military enthusiasm.

The army, owing to its composition, lent itself readily to the same treatment. Had it been a stable quantity from first to last, steadily reinvigorated by fresh blood and progressively growing in efficiency, the problem would have been wholly different. It has been shown that the reverse was the case. The veteran infantry and artillery remained unaltered; but the mounted branch, by which alone the enemy could be grappled with and beaten, being mainly composed of improvised irregulars enlisted for limited terms, was subject to violent fluctuations. That it was possible to forge this crude material into a keen and trenchant weapon had been proved by the great de Wet hunt. But that was the close of an era. To convert into practised soldiers the raw troops which thenceforward poured into South Africa could not but be a long uphill task. To initiate them roughly into a school of bold enterprise was simply not practicable. A column-

Fluctuating character of the mounted army.

commander naturally prone to err on the side of caution was not likely to become more resolute with such doubtful material. To adopt the opposite alternative, to take the most backward classes, the new Yeomanry, for example, and give them a steady preparatory training in base-camps, needed a patience and prescience which, in the doubtful aspect of the war, it was hard to expect. It was perfectly natural that a middle course should be adopted, that all the troops, of whatever quality, should be put to work at once and kept at work constantly, but at the same time, that the character of their work should be mechanical rather than individual, that devastation should take an equal place with fighting, that the drive should be favoured rather than its antitype the raid, and that the enormous advantages offered by the possession of all the railways and telegraphs in South Africa should be used to promote centralisation.

Deficient mobility.

Other causes worked in the same direction. In spite of the possession of the railways and telegraphs there had always been two grand obstacles to the success of British operations, deficient mobility and deficient intelligence, both, in the last analysis, having a common origin, lack of skill in the individual soldier. The railways gave strategical mobility in the widest sense of the term; that is to say, by their agency any number of columns could be transported rapidly to distant points. But in local mobility over the vast tracts which the scanty network of lines did not feed, the British were far inferior to the Boers. The principal reason was the difficulty of feeding the columns. The railway was still the sole base of supplies, and the scope of every expedition was inexorably determined by the supplies that could be carried during the absence of the force from the railway. Hence the march of a column tended to become formal and sterile, when what was really needed was the ability to stay in the field, hunting, harrying, watching, acting on the information of the moment, keeping the enemy "on the run"; in short, imitating the tactics of the Boers, who dodged and worried the columns by every stratagem that ingenuity could devise. The means of transport were cumbrous. Mule-transport, the most mobile

variety, could be only partially used owing to the scarcity of mules, and to the fact that they in their turn required forage. The usual plan was for a column to carry two or three days' supplies in mule-wagons as "first-line transport," and from seven to twelve days in ox-wagons, as "second-line transport." Since the ox was very slow, and required several hours at midday for resting and grazing, ox-transport imposed sharp limitations. In the old days of infantry columns the troops were little more than an escort to their own wagons. In the new days of predominantly mounted columns a bold commander could range abroad and make himself to a certain degree independent of his transport, but this millstone round his neck did not encourage boldness. On the contrary, it was a constant argument for caution and full rations when by dash and half rations he might seize and improve a fleeting opportunity. It is a remarkable circumstance that the army never learnt to simplify the problem of supply to any appreciable degree by living on the country which it ravaged. It is true that to live as the Boers lived would have required a great revolution in military organisation. The British were compelled by tactical weakness to act in organised units of considerable size. The capacity for dissolving into groups if occasion required, in the Boer manner, was almost unattainable. All that foresight could do for the maintenance of units had to be done, emergencies had to be guarded against, hand-to-mouth expedients minimised. For the Boers, life was one long emergency. Accustomed from their youth to go long distances on short commons, and knowing, even when devastation was far advanced, exactly where and how they could best obtain food, they were able, spurred by that strong incentive, necessity, to overcome or evade many of the problems that confronted the British. Still, more might have been done to direct to a common end the tasks of devastation and supply. The daily paradox was seen of columns destroying food to the value of millions and at the same time crippled for lack of food.

The Boer use of transport.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that the Boers, with all their advantages, did not suffer from transport

difficulties. But with them the difficulty arose only when they wished to concentrate. Then, until near the end of the war, they used ox-transport, and occasionally, as we have seen in the cases of De la Rey and Viljoen, lost it in action or were compelled to abandon it. But as a general rule they were far more skilful in its management. They were born cattle-drivers and they practised instinctively the art of concealing their transport at a long distance in rear of their fighting line, and of covering its movements, if necessary, by sham demonstrations. A British convoy, on the other hand, was an advertisement to the whole country-side of British intentions. Detected by scouts as soon as it began to rumble out of a railway town and spread its clumsy length over a certain road, it afforded tolerably accurate evidence of the general's itinerary. By despatch rider or helio—for to the end the Boers made regular use of the helio—the news was passed from ward to ward, from commando to commando, and if the local leader was in the mood for a fight he made his concentration, hovered and pounced.

Intelligence.

This rapid diffusion of information among the Boers leads us to the second great obstacle to British success, defective intelligence. That intelligence is the soul of war never became an instinct with the army. It is true that since Kitchener's accession great and successful efforts had been made to improve the machinery for the collection, concentration and distribution of intelligence. By a scientific arrangement of districts and sub-districts, by the carefully organised employment of native and Boer spies and by regulations to ensure that the information reached the right quarter at the earliest possible moment, the Intelligence Department, under Lieut.-Colonel David Henderson, was becoming a more and more important factor. All Kitchener's big schemes of concerted action were based on the researches of the Department. But the more it improved, the more was expected of it, until, as we foreshadowed in some remarks on Nooitgedacht,* dependence on organised intelligence as opposed to field intelligence became exaggerated and baneful. Beyond a certain point, a central department is impotent.

* See chap. v., p. 108.

With the most perfect machinery its news can never be wholly fresh; it loses touch with a column on the veld; conditions change from hour to hour; and if what should have been taken as a provisional hint or warning is construed blindly as an explicit fact, still true, disappointment or disaster may follow. It is worth while to dwell upon this point, for much unfair and ignorant criticism was directed against the Intelligence. In order to aid field intelligence, the Department did all that was possible to supply columns with expert assistance. Every effort was made to utilise the services of men like Woolls-Sampson and Colenbrander, who knew South Africa like a book, and whose instruments, for the most part, were natives. But this was not enough. We have alluded in another passage to the great advantages which accrued from the use of natives and surrendered Boers as scouts and spies; but no successes gained thereby, not even the most brilliant and far-reaching, should obscure the fact that scouting as one of the elementary military duties was neglected. The column, so to speak, borrowed eyes when it should have had as many eyes as it had mounted men. When specialised agents failed, as they frequently did, the column groped; lost touch with a fugitive foe, or perhaps fell a prey to a concentration, of which some extended reconnaissance would have given it timely notice. It was here that the lack of instinct for intelligence showed itself. Every Boer was a born scout. It must be remembered, in justice to our officers, that they dealt with much raw material which could not be converted into scouts without considerable loss, and that an undue fear of losses was a feature of the whole war. But it can scarcely be doubted that in this case a false economy was practised, which caused countless opportunities to be missed and some costly reverses to be incurred.

The existence of these two great deficiencies, lack of mobility and lack of intelligence, naturally favoured the drive. Planned on the basis of centralised intelligence, depending rather on symmetry and punctuality than on dash and cunning, destined to cover a fixed area in a fixed time with relays of supply at stated points, the drive afforded, or rather seemed to afford, compensation for both defects.

Kitchener's military policy.

We have tried to set forth fairly a number of deep-seated causes whose accumulated pressure moulded the campaign. For the most part they are such as would exist in any war of conquest waged by a highly-civilised nation against a primitive but warlike race. And they would strongly influence the policy of any Commander-in-Chief, whatever his natural bent. In the case of South Africa the natural bent of the Commander-in-Chief inclined him to swim with the current rather than against it. No man was better fitted to direct the natural processes at work to a triumphant issue. It was not as a strategist or a tactician, in the ordinary sense of those terms, that Kitchener had risen to distinction. He was pre-eminently a great organiser. To view the guerilla war mainly as a problem of organisation was in his blood, and to attack the problem on those lines elicited the best of his genius. When he assumed the command, moreover, some such treatment was peremptorily demanded. A theatre of war so vast as to stagger imagination; scattered over it a nimble enemy, strong in his very weakness; in the midst, bewildered and powerless, like Gulliver in the toils of the Lilliputians, an army which had suddenly awoken to find its methods and constitution painfully obsolete; and, behind all, a public opinion sensitive to losses yet impatient for the end. Kitchener meted out reforms with no sparing hand, and these reforms all bore the same stamp. With an iron will, immense powers of industry, memory and concentration, of a nature imperious and self-reliant, he built up, dealing masterfully with plastic material, an effectively organised system, centralised absolutely in himself. The merits of this system, if we consider the needs and tendencies of the hour, exceeded its defects. As the Middelburg conference showed, it was not far from having a prompt and signal success. But its defects were inherent in its character, and were never successfully eliminated. The structure grew in size and complexity; columns multiplied; drives became vaster in scope, more elaborate, more ingenious; the whole was manipulated smoothly from a central office, but it distinctly resembled a machine rather than a living organism. Schemes were overshadowing men; yet on the distant veld, where schemes

were translated into action, the personal factor, as it always must in war, asserted its supremacy. The most scientifically devised plan could not eliminate local contingencies, and the way in which those contingencies were met depended on elementary military qualities and the decisions of fallible human beings.

Propulsion as opposed to education.

Kitchener was inclined to think too much of propelling and too little of educating his army, to look rather to the quantity than to the quality of the work done, satisfied if the machine was humming at high pressure and grinding out its weekly quotum of captured men and material, but not sufficiently observant of the deep-rooted defects which made the end so long in coming. To this inclination we must refer his precipitate acceptance of the policy of devastation, unqualified by such instructions as would have made it perfectly clear that the aim was secondary and not primary. To this we must refer his neglect of the remount question, his extreme haste to throw untrained troops and unfit horses into the field, his failure resolutely to attack the transport question, and his subordination, generally, of tactical and individual excellence to the demands of mechanical symmetry. Hence there was a great waste of force. Columns were overworked on non-productive work, and at the really critical moments, when by chance, by design, or by the enemy's initiative, there arose an opportunity of striking a decisive blow, the troops were not equal to the task. Even in Kitchener's most earnest efforts to temper the rigidity of his own system the same latent instinct is discernible. The raid, as opposed to the drive, was to become in course of time an important feature of the operations. Although the qualities required for it were the qualities which made for tactical success under every sort of condition, the end held up was still the limited aim of attrition; so that at those critical opportunities to which we have just referred, the spirit of the raid was wont to disappear, while the ingrained habits engendered by the drive prevailed.

The limited aim of attrition.

Centralisation, its cause and effect.

Nothing is more difficult than to trace the steps of a centralisation, and to condemn or justify its establishment by an estimate of character. We have said that there pre-

vailed among Kitchener's subordinates a lack of initiative and a lack of aptitude for guerilla war. But it is not to be inferred that Kitchener did nothing to elicit initiative. Many men had freedom offered them, who persistently declined to use it. Some few accepted, but as a general rule it is fair to say that Kitchener's natural instinct for firm and continuous control was met half-way by officers whose trust in themselves was weaker than their trust in him. Kitchener's methods, moreover, were not always wise. Two or more column-commanders of practically equal rank were often directed to "co-operate" in a certain area, without any specific provision for a conflict of opinion in cases where touch with headquarters had been lost. Hence friction and jealousies which a mere reference to technical seniority was powerless to allay. Friction of course led to failure, and failure to that very imperfect remedy, more stringent central control. This grew by its own weight, and often defeated its own ends. It encouraged, in a somewhat different form, an evil which already existed, and which the truest friends of the army would fain have seen disappear. Both before Kitchener's accession to the command and in the two stormy months after it, there had been too many instances of officers failing in mutual support. Some reverses might have been retrieved or even averted had there been more wide-spread and instinctive alacrity to march to a threatened point or the scene of a reverse. While it is obvious that the rules which govern conduct in such circumstances admit of no definition, it is certain that in every army, on whatever principles administered, this alacrity should exist. Even when it seems to be thrown away, its moral effect on the enemy bears lasting fruit. Kitchener, like Roberts, held up the right ideal. Indeed he may be said to have gone sometimes almost to quixotic extremes in the endeavour to retrieve or avenge an insignificant reverse. But under his rule there grew up a sort of selfishness which, while it proved very harmful, was exceedingly difficult to detect and check. In too many of the combined operations which were continually being set in motion there was a lack of loyal co-operation between commanders. Happily

it was only in a few cases that this selfishness was conscious. Generally it was unconscious, a product of the system. Generally, too, there was an abundance of excuses; the necessities of a scheme, punctuality, a rigorously prescribed line of march, the duty of devastation, a cumbersome convoy; or, to take the diametrically opposite sort of pretext, the sudden and rare chance for independent action in a direction not contemplated by the scheme.

British leaders.

In making these strictures, we have in mind, as every writer on the British Army must have in mind, the highest ideal. It is scarcely necessary to record that the guerilla war produced a very high level of average ability. In his choice of commanders Kitchener was fearless, observant, impartial. He took young, active and capable men from any branch of the service. If brilliance was rare, incompetence was rare. It was a hard school in which these men practised. Distinction was not to be won without a keen effort, and even the most ambitious and resourceful leader found himself reduced for weeks together to beating the air, while the moral strain never relaxed. If under this strain some of the best men grew torpid and indifferent, on the whole it is remarkable with what endurance and devotion the campaign was sustained. Credit, as was inevitable, did not always go exclusively to the right quarter. It is true that an officer could count on recognition in success and on generous allowance for failure. Kitchener, more than once, in the teeth of strong pressure from outside, refused to disgrace good men who had made mistakes; but in some instances he permitted to flourish undisturbed that sort of calculated inaction which is far more harmful in the long run than rashness or imprudence. For nothing was more certain than that a fighting policy paid.

Kitchener's isolation.

These and similar oversights were but consequences of Kitchener's isolation at the head of the great military structure. How great this isolation was can best be understood by a reference to the central mechanism, the Headquarters Staff, and the Commander-in-Chief's relation to it. We have left this topic to the last, because in it are summed

up and explained at once the merits and the limitations of the military system in South Africa.

The Head-quarter Staff.

The Staff was constituted as follows. Major-General Kelly, as Adjutant-General, had independent charge of all the ordinary routine business belonging to that department. Of the General Staff proper, Colonel Ewart, as Quarter-Master-General, assisted by Major Walter Campbell, had charge of the distribution and movement of troops. Next came a group of officers working more or less directly under Colonel Ewart's department. Cavalry matters, together with such concerns as the appointment of officers to irregular corps, the collection of dismounted details and their re-mounting and redistribution, were mainly in the hands of Major Birdwood. Colonel Morgan dealt with supplies, Colonel Wickham with transport, Major Atcherley and Captain Leggett with the railways.* All these officers saw the Commander-in-Chief personally every day. Their work, perhaps, was not very scientifically divided, but since they were all able men acting in close and loyal concert, it was thoroughly well done. Although there was no sharply defined border-line between administrative and consultative functions, they may be taken to have represented the purely administrative side. Lieut.-Colonel David Henderson, as Director of Intelligence, and Lieut.-Colonel Hubert Hamilton, the Military Secretary, stood in a different category. Constantly and intimately associated with the Commander-in-Chief, they formed the small inner group which dealt with the higher strategy and the general course of operations. Lieut.-Colonel Hubert Hamilton, in particular, held a position of peculiar delicacy and importance. He was more than a military secretary. Deservedly trusted by Kitchener and thoroughly conversant with the policy and methods of his chief, he exercised, with unfailing tact and judgment, a considerable margin of discretionary power. If the

* Major Atcherley's duties were defined as "control of railway stores, permits, distribution of ordnance stores, etc." In other words, he controlled the movements of stores on the railways, while Captain Leggett arranged for the movements of troops. But in point of fact Atcherley was responsible for the distribution of all the trucks and other railway vehicles, so that his and Leggett's duties were closely intertwined.

designation, Chief of the Staff, could have been applied to any one, it was to him, but in fact there was no Chief of Staff. Nor was there any Second in Command. Kitchener assumed the whole weight of responsibility and wielded absolute supremacy. To question the wisdom of this arrangement would be beside the mark; for with a man of Kitchener's temperament it was the only possible arrangement. Nevertheless, since human capacity has limits, he could not, at one and the same time, keep in close touch with the manifold minor problems of tactics, training and local command, which were of such vital import to the success of his calculations. Nor had he any trusted intermediaries to enlighten him on these points. His staff was essentially a central staff, trained to interpret his will with punctilious fidelity, and supplemented by nothing in the least resembling a field staff. Although not by any means chained to Pretoria, he needed more leisure for travelling, for testing men and studying questions on the spot, and incidentally for gaining relief and refreshment from the tremendous strain of command. Not that he was unequal to that strain. Besides an iron constitution, Kitchener had the rare gift of equanimity. Under a burden which would have crushed smaller men he preserved a serene and confident spirit, and he transmitted this confidence to the army, the Government and the nation. All recognised in him a great and commanding personality, not, indeed, above criticism, but compelling trust. He had no rivals. There was never a moment when his fitness for the high place he occupied was not manifest and unquestioned. Once, in October 1901, thinking he detected dissatisfaction, he offered to resign his post; the Government firmly refused to entertain the idea.

Kitchener's unique fitness for the command.

Meanwhile he laboured resolutely to complete the work on his own lines. The keynote throughout is organisation. The blockhouse and the drive are the grand weapons employed. To multiply the one, to perfect the other, and to combine both in scientific harmony; such is the underlying policy. It is not always an easy thread to follow; it is often obscured, not only by the tactical initiative of the Boers, but by spasmodic efforts on the British side to establish innovations

The main course of development.

of principle; yet it does in reality represent the main course of development. If, with a full knowledge of events and a full insight into the conditions, we can see that progress on the appointed lines promised to be slow, it must not be forgotten that the retarding influences were by no means obvious at the time. Nor, amid all the daily vicissitudes of the war, was there any certain means of gauging the Boer strength and stubbornness. At present, in May 1901, the British feeling, on the whole, was hopeful. There had, it is true, been a succession of disappointments. The proclamation of December 20 1900, had produced the opposite effect to that intended. De Wet had been chased from pillar to post, but he had not been caught. French's great drive had shaken but had not cowed the Transvaal, and Blood's movement had not, as had been hoped, completed the work of demoralisation. If De la Rey had suffered some reverses, he did not appear to be much the worse. The rebellion in Cape Colony, though it had been prevented from assuming calamitous proportions, was by no means at an end. Nevertheless Kitchener had gained, and to all appearances maintained the initiative. There was no symptom of an ebullition like that of December 1900. There was even a slight revival of civil industry. Early in May the first Uitlander refugees were permitted to return to Johannesburg: three mines were re-opened, and the "growl of the sluicing stamp-head" was once more heard on the long-silent Rand. A nominated Town Council took over the municipal affairs of Johannesburg, and in both the new colonies civil departments had been organised and civil officials had begun to replace military officials. Having planned the framework of reconstruction, Sir Alfred Milner, after four years of such arduous and critical work as has rarely fallen to the lot of a colonial administration, had felt himself able to quit South Africa for the short holiday which he had asked for in his dispatch of February 6. No one could deny that great perils had been overcome and that a new era had dawned since that gloomy dispatch was penned.*

Hopeful feeling in May, 1901.

Civil revival, early May.

Milner sails for England, May 8.

* Milner landed in England on May 24. He was raised to the peerage as Viscount Milner. On August 10 he sailed once more for South Africa.

Hopes founded on the winter campaign.

And now the winter had set in, with all its attendant hardships and disabilities for guerillas whose home was the veld, whose horses and draught cattle depended on fresh grass, and who were destitute of most of the comforts and resources which fortify the army of a rich and powerful nation. Surely, it was argued, the Boers could not survive the winter. Continuous pressure, vigorously applied, must produce a collapse. It is an illustration of this hopeful feeling, that at a time when the last of the new reinforcements had barely reached South Africa an effort was made by the Government in the direction of reducing the force in the field. Still more remarkable does it seem that Kitchener, at first, was disposed to acquiesce. The war-bill, indeed, was swelling to proportions which might well have appalled the least timid of economists. The British, directly or indirectly, were paying the expenses of both sides, while the cost of the army, like that of all armies containing a large proportion of improvised troops, was disproportionate to its efficiency. This latter fact powerfully impressed Kitchener when, in answer to the enquiries of the Government, he sketched a provisional scheme of reduction, based, however, on the express condition that the rebellion in the Colony should be first stamped out. Although the matter never went beyond the stage of correspondence, the mere fact that the proposal was made and seriously considered is a noteworthy sign of the times.

Proposed reduction of force.

Boer feeling, May.

Nor was the idea that a collapse was imminent by any means confined to one side. On May 10, at a farm named De Emigratie, between Ermelo and Wakkerstroom, there met together a council of war, at which the members of the Transvaal Government were present, together with the Commandant-General and Generals Ben Viljoen, J. C. Smuts (State Attorney) and Chris Botha. It was a despondent gathering. Viljoen brought gloomy accounts of the devastation in the north-east; Smuts, representing the west, had to relate the reverses of Wildfontein and Goedvooruitzicht; Louis Botha, always a prey to irresolution, saw a cloud of columns beginning to settle once more on the high veld where he had rested secure for three months. Schalk

Burger foreshadowed for his Government a fugitive impotent career in the midst of hourly perils and discomforts. The long list of surrenders, the decay of authority in the leaders, the low reserves of ammunition, the dying hopes of foreign intervention, the paralysis of executive power—all these circumstances combined to induce those present to come to the two following resolutions:—First, to apply to Kitchener at once, and without consultation with the Free State, for permission to send an envoy to Europe who should confer personally with President Kruger as to the policy of continuing the war; second, to write to President Steyn, informing him of this decision, and proposing, in case permission should be refused, that an armistice should be sought for the purpose of allowing the two Governments to deliberate on their future course. A letter in this sense, plainly hinting that the time had come for submission, was dispatched at once to Steyn.

The Transvaal contemplates surrender.

The hint awoke an explosion of wrath in the Free State President. On May 15, without waiting to consult de Wet, he returned an indignant reply, bitterly denouncing the decision already taken and scouting the idea of an armistice. He argued that all the evils that oppressed the Transvaal weighed equally on his own country, where surrenders, hardships and difficulties had left the spirit of the people unshaken. He reminded the Transvaalers that the Free State had staked its existence in order to help them, that for them to weaken now was to betray not only their allies but the Colonial rebels. But this was only the spontaneous outburst of one passionate enthusiast. The views of de Wet and Hertzog had to be obtained; De la Rey must be consulted; and, before any irrevocable step was taken, it was necessary that a solemn conference should take place between the principal leaders, military and civil, of both Republics. To bring about such a meeting in a country aflame with war was naturally a matter of time and of much risk and difficulty. Meanwhile the issue hung in the balance, and much depended on the operations of the next few weeks.

Steyn's indignation, May 15.

The proposed joint council of war.

Such was the situation when the winter campaign opened.

CHAPTER XI

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1901

(May-September)

I

Vlakfontein

SUMMARISED briefly, the British dispositions in the early part of May were as follows:—In the Free State, Elliot, Bruce Hamilton, Knox and Rundle controlled the mobile columns in the four newly-created military districts, and were preparing drives on a large scale. In the midland districts of Cape Colony, Colonel Douglas Haig was directing the pursuit of the raiding bands. In the Transvaal, Grenfell and Colenbrander were operating in the far north, around Pietersburg; Blood and Plumer, having brought to an end their big movement in the north-east, were beginning fresh operations in the south-east, where Botha's best commandos had been resting for nearly three months and whither Viljoen had taken refuge, after his escape from Blood. Finally, in the Western Transvaal, where the first notable event of the winter campaign was to occur, a big concentric movement under Methuen and Mildmay Willson had come to an abortive conclusion in the middle of May,* and the columns engaged in it had been withdrawn; Methuen and Rawlinson to the Kimberley-Mafeking Railway; Babington and Ingouville-Williams to Klerksdorp; Dixon to his intrenched camp at Naauwpoort, south of the Magaliesberg.

British dispositions in May.

Western Transvaal in mid-May.

Map W. Transvaal end of chap. xx.

Some changes of command followed. Babington was transferred to the Eastern Transvaal, giving up his column

Changes in command.

* See chap. ix, p. 233.

to Colonel Hickie, and Major-General Fetherstonhaugh assumed control of the three columns of Hickie, Rawlinson and Ingouville-Williams.* Mildmay Willson, though he retained the command of the district west of Johannesburg, ceased to exercise active control of columns in the field.

While the British march south, Kemp concentrates in the north.

It will be remembered that at the critical moment of the operations just concluded, De la Rey and his men had dispersed and vanished, no one knew whither. When the various columns had been re-provisioned and were ready for fresh work this ignorance still prevailed. Such information as there was seemed to indicate that De la Rey had concentrated in the south, near Wolmaransstad. Methuen, Rawlinson and Williams, therefore, were ordered to converge on this point. The rumour, in point of fact, was true only to this extent, that De la Rey, personally, was on his way to the south on important official business. But there was no concentration in the south, and while the three columns were drawing in, as at the beginning of the month, upon a phantom enemy,† the real point of danger was in the north, where, among the rugged kloofs of the Zwartruggens and within easy reach of Dixon's camp at Naauwpoort, the young General Kemp was quietly collecting a considerable force.

Dixon sets out from Naauwpoort, May 26.

Dixon, unaware of this gathering, set out from Naauwpoort on May 26 leading 430 mounted men, 800 infantry, seven guns and a pom-pom, with the object of clearing farms and searching for hidden guns and ammunition among the hills to the westward of Naauwpoort. We should remind the

* Hickie's Column:—I.Y. (103rd and 107th Cos.), 200; Roberts's Horse, 114; Kitchener's Horse, 29; Imperial Light Horse, 369; 2nd Cheshire Regt., 182; "P" Battery, two guns; 78th Battery, two guns; two pom-poms.

Rawlinson's Column:—8th and 2nd M.I., 720; 2nd Cheshire Regt. 179; "P" Battery, two guns; 38th Battery, two guns; 37th Battery, one howitzer; two pom-poms.

Ingouville-Williams's Column:—21st M.I., 432; N.S.W. Bushmen, 220; N.S.W. M.R., 526; 2nd Cheshire Regt., 192; 78th Battery, two guns; Elswick Batt., one gun; Royal Australian Art., two guns; two pom-poms.

† The operations were not without success. On May 24, Williams found and attacked the laager of Van Rensburg at Leeuwdoorns. The New South Wales troopers rushed the position with much spirit and captured 28 burghers and 47 wagons and carts.

reader that when Dixon, in April, took over the command at Naauwpoort the force had just been reconstituted. The Australians and New Zealanders were time-expired, and the Yeomanry and Scottish Horse who took their place were new levies, who as yet had seen no serious fighting. The infantry and gunners were veterans, but the force as a whole was ill-fitted to operate independently in a hornet's nest like the Zwartruggens.

Action of Vlakfontein, May 29.

Nothing of any moment happened till the 29th, when the force had reached the farm Vlakfontein, which lies about sixteen miles to the south-west of Olifant's Nek and the same distance from Naauwpoort. On this day Dixon left in camp four weak companies of infantry and marched out to the westward with the rest of his force, distributed as follows:—

Map, p. 284.

Dixon's dispositions.

(*a*) Left, under Major Chance, R.A.—Two guns 28th Battery, 230 7th Battalion Imperial Yeomanry, one company 1st Derbyshire Regiment (about 100).

(*b*) Centre, under Colonel Wylly.—Two guns 8th Battery, one howitzer, two companies 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers (about 75 each), one company 1st Derbyshire Regiment (about 100), one pom-pom.

(*c*) Right, under Lieut.-Colonel Duff (8th Hussars, C.O. Scottish Horse).—Two guns 8th Battery, 200 Scottish Horse, two companies 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers (75 each).

The morning's work.

The ground before Dixon was a gentle valley, bordered on the south by a bare and grassy down, on the north by a ridge, rocky and broken, but of a slightly lower elevation. The valley extends westward for about five miles and then unites with another and broader valley. Dixon sent his left and right wings along the southern and northern ridges respectively, and in person led the centre along the low ground. After advancing in this order for about three and a half miles the left and right halted, each with a screen of mounted men thrown out to the westward, while from 10 till 12 o'clock the party in the centre raided farms at Cyferwater and Waterval and searched for some guns which were reported to have been hidden in the neighbourhood. At midday, the search proving fruitless, Dixon took back the centre detachment to the farm Elandsfontein, lying about two

miles due north of the camp. Here a large cache of ammunition was discovered, but Dixon decided that it was too late in the day to begin its removal and at 1.30 P.M. gave orders for the whole force to return to camp, Chance's left detachment to act as rear-guard. The interest now centres round this portion of the force, posted as we left it, on the southern ridge. Chance had placed his two guns, escorted by "H" Company of the Derbys and a party of Yeomanry, 1,000 yards from the western end of the ridge. The rest of the Yeomanry, 150 in number, were thrown out as a screen to the front and left. The wind was blowing from the west.

Chance's rear-guard.

Kemp overwhelms the rear-guard, 1.30 P.M.

At 1.30, just when Chance was preparing for his retirement to camp, the Boers, who had been seen in small numbers all the morning, and had been shelled intermittently along the whole front, fired the grass to the westward of the ridge and under cover of the dense smoke, which blew in the faces of the British, rapidly concentrated against the rear-guard, and began to drive in the Yeomanry screen. Kémp simultaneously threatened Duff's ridge, but rather, it would appear, as a feint than with any serious intention. Chance, after throwing a few shells at the target of smoke which was all his gunners could discern, retired his infantry about 1,200 yards along the ridge in the direction of the camp, and then followed them with the guns; but the fire rapidly gained on his detachment, and the Boers, pressing on under its cover, drove the Yeomanry before them. Just at this moment a messenger arrived from Duff on the northern ridge with the news that he too was being hotly attacked and desired help from the rear-guard. But it was manifest now that the real peril threatened Chance, who at once sent back the same messenger with an urgent summons for reinforcements. Before any assistance could reach him the mischief was done. Masked by their curtain of smoke the Boers had rapidly outflanked Chance on the left, and from this quarter, out of the very flames, there suddenly burst a torrent of 500 Boers, some firing from horseback, others leading their ponies and firing as they ran. The charge smothered all opposition. The Yeomanry recruits were dropping in scores; nine of their officers out of sixteen were killed or wounded, and the

broken remnants passed the guns and fell to the rear. The gunners, loyal to the unvarying tradition of their regiment, were shot down at their posts; the escort of 100 Derbys, fighting to the last, was almost annihilated; and Kemp was master of the ridge. The captured guns were promptly turned by the Boers on Duff's ridge, while some of the victors began to press forward and attack the camp at long range. Duff was still engaged by the Boer left, and for a short time it looked as though the disaster must be irreparable.

The counter-attack, 2–3 P.M.

By 2 o'clock Duff and Dixon had both learned that Chance was in serious straits, though the nature and extent of his losses were not yet realised. At the time both detachments were retiring towards camp. Dixon at once sent orders to Duff to reinforce Chance, gave his own units the same objective, and himself galloped across the valley towards the scene of action. On his way he found in action "C" company of the Derbys, who had been forming the western pickets of the camp during the absence of the column, together with the three guns of his own centre detachment, which had been leading the retirement to camp. Leaving these guns to protect the camp, he hurried "C" company forward to the scene of the disaster. Not far behind, under Colonel Wylly, came the infantry of the centre detachment; and, a mile away to the westward, there marched steadily across the valley two companies of Borderers under Major Mayne, whom Duff had sent from the northern ridge. Under this resolute infantry counter-attack, supported as it was by a heavy artillery fire, Kemp's men lost heart. The grassy levels of the ridge they had won so easily made a poor position for defence; while their own shells, fired by inexperienced hands, burst wildly. As the rushes drew nearer the burghers began to gallop away, none waiting for the bayonet. "C" company of the Derbys, led by Major Browne and Lieutenant Manly and joined by a good many men of the shattered Yeomanry squadrons, reached the position first and recaptured the guns. This was the end of the day's fighting. The Boers retreated in every quarter of the field, and Dixon bivouacked near the scene of the fight.

Kemp driven off.

The casualties were the heaviest since Nooitgedacht. On the

Losses.

British side six officers and 43 men were killed, and seven officers and 123 men were wounded, the large majority of these losses occurring among the rear-guard. Here the Yeomanry lost 60 out of a strength of 150, the Derbyshire Company 71 out of 100, and the gunners of the 8th Battery 17 out of 19.

The new Boer charging tactics.

Kemp's stratagem with the veld fire and his lightning onslaught upon the rear-guard was the first example of a new class of field tactics. A rehearsal of this dramatic scene had been given two months before by the same burghers at Geduld.* There, however, the grass was not fired, the British engaged were some of the best of the irregular mounted troops, and the charge was little more than a parade-ground flourish. Here, surprising and sweeping through a screen of unskilled mounted men, it was pushed home against infantry and guns. There was no "shock." The horse was solely the means of transporting the rifleman with the utmost rapidity to close quarters. Considerable target as a man on horseback is, this and other actions proved that under certain conditions close contact could be gained with very little loss; and at close quarters the rifle, in highly skilled hands, was a more deadly weapon than the steel.

Dixon retires, May 30–31.

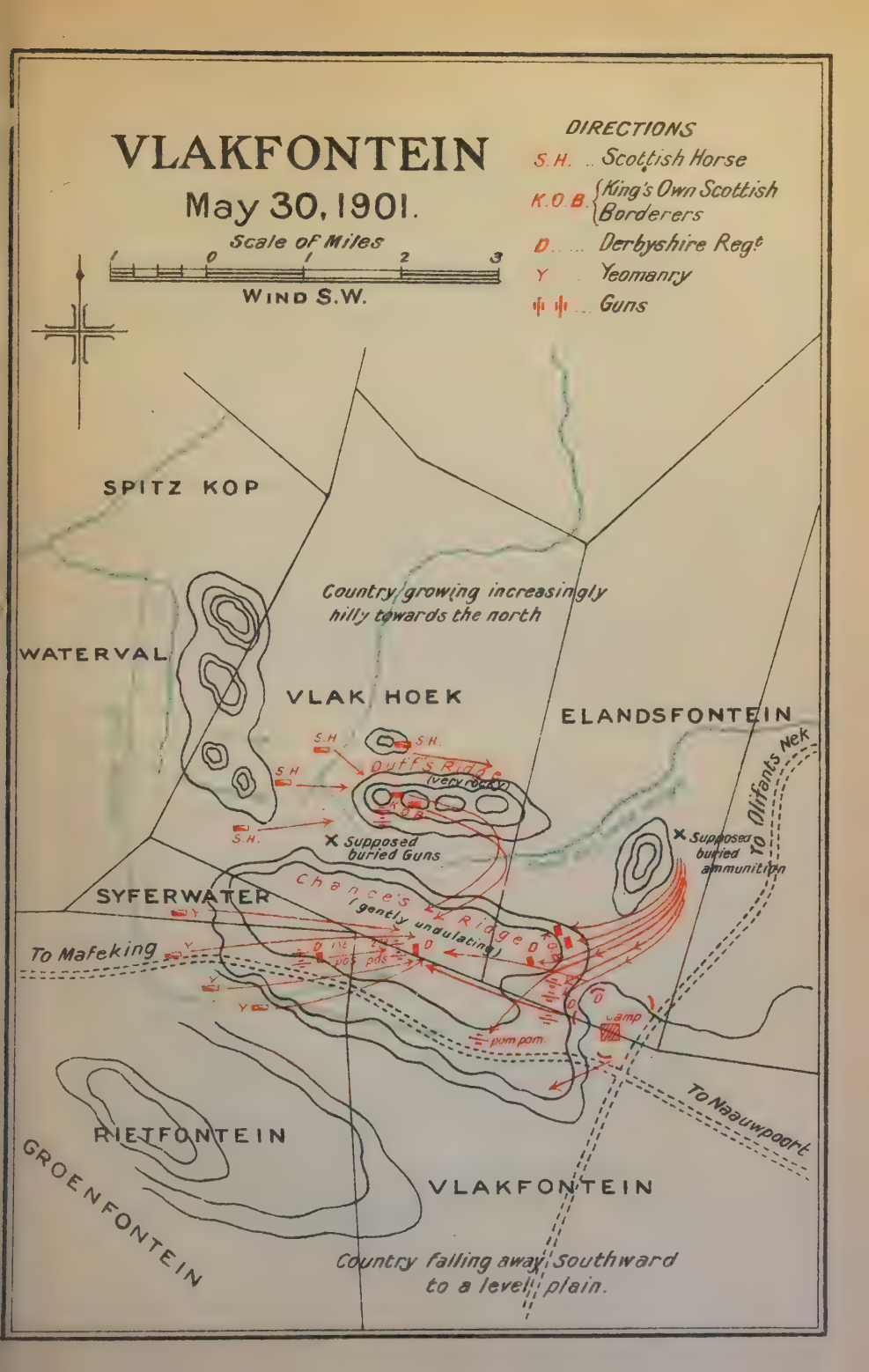
Though the disciplined valour of his infantry had left Dixon victorious, he was in a wholly false position. The composition of his force, not to speak of the losses incurred, made it incapable of offensive measures. Kemp's concentration was swelling from hour to hour. Dixon, therefore, rightly resolved on a retreat to his base. Even this course was not without its dangers; but by making a forced march on the night of the 30th, and leaving behind his wounded † he reached Naauwpoort safely on the morning of the 31st. It

Reprisals fail, June.

was now the turn of organisation. Every column in the western Transvaal was ordered to the scene, Fetherstonhaugh bringing up Rawlinson, Williams and Hickie from the south,

* Chap. ix., p. 224. See also chap. ii., pp. 51, 52.

† Rumours obtained currency as to the wholesale shooting of wounded men on the ridge by Boers after the capture of the guns. The evidence, when sifted, proves that a man named Van Zyl, who was wounded himself, crawled about and shot at least three wounded men before he could be stopped. Otherwise the behaviour of the Boers was good.


VLAKFONTEIN
May 30, 1901.
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3
WIND S.W.
DIRECTIONS
S.H. .. Scottish Horse
K.O.B. { King's Own Scottish Borderers
D. .. Derbyshire Regt
Y . Yeomanry
... Guns
SPITZ KOP
Country growing increasingly hilly towards the north
WATERVAL
VLAK HOEK
ELANDSFONTEIN
Duff's Ridge
(very rocky)
S.H.
Supposed buried Guns
Supposed buried ammunition
To Olifants Nek
SYFERWATER
Chance's Ridge
(gently undulating)
To Mafeking
pom pom
camp
To Naauwpoort
RIETFONTEIN
GROENFONTEIN
VLAKFONTEIN
Country falling away Southward to a level plain.

while Methuen,* who had been operating near Zeerust, drew in from the west, and a new column,† hastily transported to Krugersdorp, under Brigadier-General Gilbert Hamilton, joined in from the eastward. Finally, Dixon, having re-fitted his force, blocked Magato Nek on the north. The combination came to nothing; for Kemp, threatened with envelopment, dispersed his men to every point of the compass.

II

Graspan

De la Rey's journey to the Free State, end of May.

It was De la Rey's spirit that inspired the tactics used at Vlakfontein; but while his lieutenant was engaged in putting them into effect, De la Rey himself was far away in the Free State. None but pressing reasons would have induced him to leave the Transvaal. That journey to the south, which had puzzled the British Intelligence, was undertaken originally for the purpose of meeting Christiaan de Wet at some point near the frontier. The Free State leader, however, never reached the rendezvous. On his way thither he was recalled by a messenger from Steyn communicating the contents of that despairing letter from the Transvaal Government, which was alluded to at the end of the last chapter. Sending a message to De la Rey to follow him into the Free State, de Wet at once returned, and in the last week of May, he, the President and De la Rey, were in conference near Reitz. In this circle there was very little talk of submission, but it was agreed that the journey must be made to the Transvaal for the purpose of holding a joint Council of War. On the very morning of departure, June 6, the presence of the party near Reitz led to the second notable

De la Rey, Steyn and de Wet, prepare to journey to the Council of War in the Transvaal, June 6.

* Methuen's Column:—I.Y., 1,400; Bedfordshire Regt. M.I., 63; Bechuanaland Rifles, 64; 1st North. Fus., 146; 1st Loyal North Lancashires, 334; 3rd South Wales Borderers, 146; 4th Batt. R.F.A., six guns; 37th Batt. R.F.A., two howitzers; R.F.F. Art., two guns; four pom-poms (H Section and R.F.F.).

† Gilbert Hamilton's Column:—5th Dragoon Guards, 373; 13th Hussars, 544; 1st East Lancashire Regt., 363; two guns "Q" Battery; two guns 64th Battery; one pom-pom (F section).

episode of the winter campaign. It must be prefaced by a brief review of the operations in the Free State up to that point.

Operations in the Free State, May–June.

Bruce-Hamilton.

Knox.

Driving of a not very effective sort had been in full swing. Bruce Hamilton, commanding the Southern District, had operated during May on both sides of the railway, two of his seven columns, under Monro and White, having been diverted to Cape Colony towards the end of the month. Charles Knox, though he nominally controlled the central district, was sent on May 13 to Bothaville, with the double object of breaking up a commando on the Valsch River and of heading off any of De la Rey's men who might be driven south by the operations round Wolmaransstad. This expedition came to little, and at the beginning of June, Knox and Bruce Hamilton joined in an extensive sweep over the south-western part of the Free State. Knox, with the columns of Pilcher and Thorneycroft,* watched the line of the Modder; the South African Constabulary, in pursuance of the policy described in the last chapter, held a line of posts thrown out from Kaffir River Station to Petrusburg; and from the southward, towards this double barrier, Bruce Hamilton launched the whole of his available force divided into seven small columns, with orders to converge on Petrusburg. As supports to this driving-line, "stop-columns" were organised on either flank, the Kimberley mobile column and another under Colonel Henry acting from the west, and a force from Bloemfontein on the east. This typical example of the scientific drive produced nearly three hundred surrenders; but very few of the real fighting burghers figured in the list.

Rundle, end of May.

Rundle, at the end of May, was just bringing to an end his operations in the Brandwater Basin, as described in Chapter IX. Meanwhile the northern part of his district was encroached on by Elliot, whose proper sphere under Kitchener's scheme of sub-division lay west of Reitz and

* Thorneycroft's Column:—I.Y. 18th Batt., and 21st and 22nd Cos., 740; Thorneycroft's M.I., 168; Burma M.I., 185; 76th Battery, four guns; one pom-pom (X Section). Pilcher's Column:—7th M.I., 900; I.Y. 6th Battalion, 642; 14th Battery, four guns; one pom-pom (M Section).

MAJOR-GENERAL F. W. KITCHENER.

Photo by F. B. Stewart & Son, Poona.

MAJOR-GENERAL BRUCE HAMILTON.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Johannesburg.

Frankfort. That Knox should go to the Vaal, Bruce Hamilton help the Colony, and Elliot encroach on Rundle is sufficient proof that the sub-division of the Free State into four districts was little more than nominal The four generals represented convenient groups of columns, allotted roughly to certain areas, but manipulated at Kitchener's discretion, in pursuance generally of large driving schemes. The district system.

In conformity with these schemes, the freest use was made, not only of the troops within the Free State, but of columns in the Transvaal and Natal. Thus, when Elliot, leading the three columns of Bethune, De Lisle and Lowe * (who had temporarily succeeded Broadwood) opened, on May 7, his third † drive of the winter campaign from the line Villiersdorp-Frankfort-Tafel Kop eastward to Vrede, two columns from beyond the Vaal, under Eustace Knox and Rimington,‡ acted as "stops" on his left flank, and swept up wagons and stock which were struggling for an outlet northward. And, again, when Kitchener ordered the movement to be carried on to the Natal border, the left flank was similarly strengthened by columns from Standerton, under Colonel Colville and Colonel Pink,§ who marched up the right bank of the Klip River, while Elliot's left wing skirted the left bank, and Hildyard, from Natal, held the principal passes of the Drakensberg. A narrow furrow of devastation marked the track of Elliot's columns; otherwise the operations were a ploughing of the sands. The Boers did not want to fight, and the British could not make Elliot in May.

* Bethune's Column:—1st Dragoon Guards, 581; 3rd Dragoon Guards, 317; I.Y. 590; Prince of Wales's L.H. De Lisle's Column:—6th M.I. 400; South Australians, 326; 62nd Battery, two guns; one pom-pom (A Section). Broadwood's Column:—7th Dragoon Guards, 580; I.Y., 440; 82nd Battery, four guns.

† Elliot's first drive westward from Kroonstad was described in chap. x. His second was from Vredefort to Frankfort.

‡ E. Knox's Column:—10th Hussars, 566; 12th Lancers, 663; 2nd Somerset L.I., 200; "Q" Battery, four guns; Elswick Batt., one gun; one pom-pom (K Section). Rimington's Column:—3rd N.S.W. M.R., 734; I.Y. 21st Batt., 260; 2nd East Surrey Regt., 234; Royal Aust. Art., four guns; one pom-pom (U Section).

§ Colville's Column:—2nd M.I., 300; 2nd Johannesburg M.R., 106; 2nd East Surrey Regt., 345; 63rd Battery, four guns; one pom-pom (O Section).

them fight. While it is true that a proportion of Elliot's troops lacked training and experience, the atmosphere of set formality which distinguished all these movements was little calculated to foster enterprise even among the seasoned regiments. At Botha's Pass, which was reached on May 19, Elliot turned about and converged on the Witkopjes, an isolated group of precipitous hills twenty-five miles to the westward, where some 400 Boers had ensconced themselves. These having scattered at the approach of the British, Elliot sent his columns to different towns to fill up with supplies, and at the end of the month united them again at Vrede. From here he was ordered to take his division back to Kroonstad, by way of Reitz and Lindley, and on June 3 he started.

Elliot in early June.

Action of Graspan, June 6.

On the evening of the 5th, at the Wilge River, he learned that some fifteen miles to the westward a Boer convoy was crossing his front from north to south. Major Sladen, of the East Yorks Regiment, and 200 of the 6th M.I. and South Australian Bushmen were detached accordingly from De Lisle's force and sent on a night march to intercept this convoy. Sladen was successful in capturing it at sunrise on the 6th; but his prize, a women's laager of 120 wagons and carts, turned out to be not very valuable; nor were there many combatant burghers among the hundred males present. Some of these fled, 45 were taken after a feeble resistance, and the wagons were then parked close to a Kaffir kraal on the farm Graspan, near Reitz, while Sladen sent back 60 men to communicate with De Lisle. Meanwhile another messenger, in this case a Boer, was carrying the news at full gallop to a little encampment some five miles away, where Steyn, De la Rey, and de Wet, with the bodyguards of the two former, were just finishing breakfast in the frosty morning air, their horses standing saddled in readiness for the day's march. The capture of a laager of women was so common an event in the Free State, that de Wet was for disregarding it and saving the horses for their long march to the Transvaal. De la Rey, in whose district such events were rarer, promptly voted for a rescue, and since he was the guest of the party, his decision was accepted. Steyn,

with a small escort, was left behind, and the rest, among whom were Commandant Davel, leader of de Wet's body guard, and General Piet Fourie,* galloped away to Graspan. Some local burghers, gathered *en route*, swelled the little force to a total of about 200. At midday Davel, having reconnoitred the British position, attacked it vigorously from the east. Sladen, who, until fire broke out, had taken the Boers for Bethune's column, found his advanced line driven in with considerable loss. The men were retired through the parked wagons to the huts of the Kaffir kraal and to a small cattle enclosure. Here the whole force prepared for a stout resistance. In the meantime, many of the wagons were recaptured by the Boers and driven off the field.

A hot fight, in which excellent spirit and determination were shown on both sides, now raged for four hours. Sladen's party had the best cover, for the Boers held only one hut, a low mud wall and the shelter of a row of wagons. On the other hand, the Boers were nearly all picked men and excellent shots. The contest was one of accurate sharp-shooting, and both sides suffered heavily. No impression, however, was made on the defence, and at 3 o'clock De Lisle, galloping up with the rest of his column, at once relieved the situation. The Boers made off, and the wagons, which had not gone far, once more changed hands. The kraal, after this very gallant defence, was found to be a shambles, littered with the dead bodies of 26 of Sladen's men and 17 Boers. Sladen also had 25 wounded and the Boers about 20. Thanks to the coolness and pluck of Sergeant Sutherland of the Gordon Highlanders, 40 of the 45 prisoners originally captured were retained. †

The Boers driven off, 3 P.M.

Losses.

* On the ground of compromising correspondence with the British, Fourie had recently been relieved of his command in the south-west.

† Sladen received brevet promotion. Captain Finlay (Bedfordshire Regt. M.I.) and Captain Langley (Durham L.I. M.I.) both showed exemplary courage in a case where all did well. Lieutenant Stout (Bedfordshire Regt.), who was among the killed, was a very brave and promising young officer. Lieutenant White (Gordon Highlanders) also deserves mention. This officer, when Davel's men were mistaken for friends, was sent out to meet them. He was taken prisoner and stripped of everything but his shirt, but escaped and ran six miles till he met De Lisle, who from the lips of this strange but timely messenger learnt the news of Sladen's peril. Among the Boer dead was an artillery officer, Commandant Thuysma.

Steyn, de Wet and De la Rey prepare to enter the Transvaal, mid-June.

While Elliot marched on to Kroonstad, which he reached on June 15 without any other fighting, Steyn and his party rode north for the Transvaal. At Vrede, Manie Botha supplied a force of local burghers, guided by whom the party crossed the Vaal and safely ran the gauntlet of the railway blockhouses between Standerton and Volksrust. But to bring about the desired meeting with Botha and the Transvaal Government was a delicate little problem; for since the middle of May the Eastern Transvaal had been swarming with British columns.

III

Mooifontein, Wilmansrust and the Boer Council of War

Operations in the Eastern Transvaal, May–June.

For the campaign in this quarter Kitchener had had at his disposal Plumer's column,* refitted after the Pietersburg expedition, Blood's force of six columns under Walter Kitchener, Park, Douglas, Pulteney, Beatson and Benson, together with a seventh force now added under Colonel Spens, who had led Smith-Dorrien's infantry brigade throughout French's drive. With the exception of Park, who was at Lydenburg, all these were gathered on the Delagoa line.†

* Plumer's Column:—5th Queensland I.B., 340; 6th New Zealand M.R., 419; 1st Royal Munsters, 264; 18th Battery, four guns; two pom-poms (Q Section).

† W. Kitchener's Column:—5th West Aust. M.I., 160; 6th ditto, 200; 2nd I.L.H., 138; 1st Devons, 833; 53rd Battery, two guns; 10th Mountain Batt., one gun; one pom-pom (S Section).

Park's Column:—4th M.I., 123; 1st Royal Irish Regt., 613; 53rd Battery, two guns; one pom-pom (P Section).

Douglas's Column:—3rd M.I., 350; 1st Royal Scots, 704; 84th Battery, four guns; one pom-pom (L Section).

Pulteney's Column:—1st Royal Dragoons, 345; 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, 370; 1st Scots Guards, 854; 66th Battery, two guns; one pom-pom (P Section).

Beatson's Column:—5th Victorian M.R., 750; 2nd Duke of Cornwall's L.I., 366; 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, 180; 9th Battery, four guns; two pom-poms.

Benson's Column:—18th M.I., 466; 19th M.I., 362; 2nd Scottish Horse, 503; 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 724; 21st, 81st, and 61st Batteries, five guns; 10th Mt. Batt., one gun; two pom-poms (C and R Sections).

Spens's Column:—5th Lancers, 153; 4th M.I., 457; 2nd Royal Berks, 570; 4th and 10th Mountain Batts., three guns; one pom-pom (S Section).

On the same line was Allenby, retaining intact the column he had led under French. On the Natal line were Rimington, with a newly-formed column of Australians and Yeomanry, Eustace Knox with his cavalry force, and a strong column under Colonel Bullock,* whom we last saw covering French's line of supply in the final phase of the great eastward movement. With the exception of Beatson, who remained in reserve on the railway, and Park, who operated from Lydenburg, all these columns, during the first half of May, moved into the "high veld" between the two railways and engaged in a series of somewhat desultory operations. Carolina was the only advanced depôt of supplies; there were no geographical barriers; while the Boers were slippery as eels and evanescent as smoke. Confusing and purposeless as the operations may seem, both sides had certain definite aims. From this time forward, among many incidental purposes, two permanent ideas always actuated Kitchener in planning operations in the Eastern Transvaal. One was to push the Boers eastward from the neighbourhood of Johannesburg and Pretoria, the other was to capture the itinerant Transvaal Government. At the present moment the latter aim was peculiarly tempting. Kitchener knew, not only that the Government was near Ermelo, but that its resolution was failing; for Mr. Burger, in accordance with the decision reached on May 10 at De Emigratie Farm, had duly forwarded to Pretoria a request for leave to send an envoy to Europe. Although Kitchener had refused this, he had granted facilities for a private cablegram to be sent to President Kruger, asking advice as to the policy of prolonging the war. The answer, too, was to be private, but there were indirect means of discovering its purport; and meanwhile, one lucky *coup*, resulting in the capture of the "Cape-Cart" administration in the hour of its doubt and depression, might finish the war. At any rate, it was of

Kitchener's aims in the Eastern Transvaal: (1) to push the Boers eastward; (2) to catch the Government.

* Bullock's Column:—5th M.I., 758; Gough's M.I., 600; Johannesburg M.R., 318; C.-in-C.'s Bodyguard, 182; 2nd Dorset Regt., 500; 74th Battery, four guns; "J" Battery, six guns; Elswick Batt., one gun; one pom-pom (F section).

urgent importance to prevent any meeting with the bellicose Free Staters. A special branch of the Intelligence, exclusively devoted to tracking the Transvaal Government laager, had been organised and placed under Captain Sir Thomas Cuninghame; but although these skilled detectives were rarely at fault, the heavy British columns which made use of the information were indifferent instruments for effecting an arrest. The laager was well defended. Louis Botha himself had resolved that, until the question of peace or war was settled, the security of the Government should be his personal concern. He, therefore, was in fairly constant attendance, planning amid daily vicissitudes and hazards to bring about the meeting with the Free State leaders. Other members of the Government party were Generals Smuts and Ben Viljoen. It will be remembered that the latter, after his narrow escape from Blood in April, had joined Botha and the Government in the first week of May and had been present at the despondent council held at De Emigratie. He had come attended only by a small escort, having dropped the main body of his burghers, under that restless leader Müller, in the Bethal District. A week later, however, Botha found some work for Viljoen. He was given a selected body of burghers, of the Standerton, Heidelberg and Bethal commandos, with orders to pounce on any isolated British detachment which might make its appearance. On the Boer side, these two small bodies, under Müller and Viljoen respectively, may be described as the only "forces in being" when the British operations began. For a short time both lay low.

Botha's solicitude for the Government.

Viljoen.

Müller.

British operations, E. Transvaal, May.

The first phase of the British operations comprised a converging movement on Ermelo by Bullock and Rimington from the south and Blood's columns from the north, and a similar attempt on Bethal by Plumer and Allenby from the north-west, Knox from the south, and Rimington from the east. Neither was successful. Fresh combinations were then tried. Blood's group, on the one hand, and the columns of Plumer, Knox and Rimington on the other, were ordered to harry the country east of the meridian of Ermelo. Blood took the Carolina and Steynsdorp districts and Plumer, after

a sweep southward from Bethal to the Vaal and a refit at Standerton, trekked far into the south-east with the object of converging on Piet Retief, as French had done in March.

Action of Mooifontein, May 25.

It was during the preliminary sweep to the Vaal that Viljoen found an opportunity of striking at an isolated detachment. One of Plumer's convoys, consisting of 150 wagons, containing sick, wounded, prisoners and Boer families, left Bethal for Standerton on May 23. It was escorted by 400 of the Somerset L.I., 250 Munster Fusiliers, 60 troopers of the 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers, 40 New Zealanders of the sixth contingent, and two guns of "Q" Battery. Colonel Gallwey of the Somerset L.I. commanded. Viljoen, assisted by a contingent of local burghers under Mears, having harassed this convoy for two days, attacked it in force on the 25th at Mooifontein, falling on front and rear simultaneously. For nine miles Gallwey sustained a running fight with great coolness and skill, keeping his unwieldy convoy, which was accompanied by a mass of captured cattle and sheep, constantly on the move and repulsing repeated charges. At one time the Boers used the same tactics as at Vlakfontein, firing the long grass, withered and highly inflammable as it always is in the winter, and galloping up under cover of the smoke, only to fall back again under the steady fire of the infantry. All units of the force behaved well, but the small band of New Zealanders deserve a special word of praise, as does Quartermaster Moran of the Somerset L.I., who repelled a rush on some wagons with an improvised squad of cooks and invalids. Major Lloyd handled the rear-guard of Somerset L.I. with nerve and resolution. Gallwey's casualties were 43, Viljoen's about 30. Although of its kind Mooifontein was a particularly hot engagement, scores of convoys all over the field of war were doing the same sort of work. The features of every scene are similar: the procession of clumsy ox-wagons, urged forward with the cracking of whips and the yelling of native drivers; the swarms of nimble Boer horsemen buzzing and stinging, now here, now there; the extended lines of infantry, footsore but

undaunted; the flames of a burning farm, perhaps; and overhead the unflecked blue of the winter sky.

Bullock, Grey and the Transvaal Government, May–mid-June.

In the meantime Bullock had been working independently between Ermelo and Standerton, raiding farms and playing an amusing game of hide-and-seek with the Transvaal Government, which, with the help of exact intelligence from Botha, danced round the British column with marvellous agility. At the end of May Bullock was assisted by a new column under Colonel R. Grey, the officer who had led Babington's mounted troops in the Western Transvaal; Grey, in his turn, soon gave place to Colonel Garratt,* who had commanded the 6th Dragoon Guards, under Allenby. The Government now entered on a period of exhausting marches and hairbreadth escapes. Evading the embrace of Bullock by labyrinthine doublings, they enjoyed a few days' peace at Spitzkop, twenty-five miles south-east of Ermelo, only to find themselves entangled in Plumer's sweep from the Upper Vaal to Piet Retief. Flying before the row of columns they reached Piet Retief on June 7, and thence doubled back to the wild Slangapiesberg, where they found Rimington already in position to receive them. Throwing him off by stratagem, with a bare margin of an hour and with the loss of all their heavy baggage, they broke back once more to the neighbourhood of Ermelo. And now the prospect brightened. Not only was communication gained with the Free State leaders, who were waiting near the frontier, but news arrived which at once raised the spirits of the fugitives and smoothed the way for the long-deferred meeting.

Map, Transvaal Government track, end of chap. xx.

June 7.

Mid-June.

Action of Wilmansrust, June 12.

Beatson, until the end of May, had been left in reserve on the railway; but on the 25th he too took the field. After a short expedition to the south, in which Allenby co-operated from Springs, the latter, in consequence of the news of Vlakfontein, was diverted to the Western Transvaal, and Beatson, on June 6, marched out from Brugspruit Station on an independent expedition to Bethal. On the 10th, having arrived at the confluence of the Olifant's River and the

* Garratt's Column:—6th Queenslanders, 307; 7th New Zealanders, 490; 1st East Lancashires, 309; 9th and 73rd Batteries, four guns; 1 pom-pom (C Section).

Steenkool Spruit, Beatson detached the left wing of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, numbering 350 men with two pom-poms, under the command of Major Morris, R.A., with orders to act against a small laager reported to be at Boschmansfontein, twenty-five miles to the eastward. The laager was found to have been evacuated. Beatson then sent instructions to Morris to double back and combine with the main body in an attack, to be made at dawn on the 13th, upon another laager at Elandsfontein. Morris marched in pursuance of these instructions and on the evening of the 12th bivouacked at Wilmansrust, on the Middelburg-Ermelo road, about twelve miles from Beatson. The camp was pitched close to a farm which possessed a substantial stone cattle-kraal, having a wall five feet high. Within this was posted an inlying picket of twelve men. Of the outlying pickets the largest, consisting of an officer and 30 men, was placed about a mile to the south-east of the camp. But although 120 men out of 350 were nominally on picket duty, the camp was ill-prepared for attack. As in many other cases at this period, the perimeter defence was badly arranged. The posts were too large and too far apart, with inadequate provision for intercommunication. They were established, moreover, in broad daylight in a country where keen eyes watched every movement of a British force. Discipline, vigilance and steadiness would have gone far to compensate for such disadvantages, but those sound military virtues had not yet been learnt by this detachment of Victorians. For the most part badly officered, they had not been broken, during their two months' service in the field, to that firm control under which all irregulars were inclined to be restive, but which all imperatively needed. On this night negligence was general. In the outpost-line no effective watch was kept and in the camp itself the men, contrary to express orders, slept at some distance from their rifles. The force was at the mercy of any enterprising enemy, and it so happened that such an enemy was at hand.

Müller storms Morris's camp, 7.30 P.M.

Commandant Müller had been Viljoen's right-hand man at Rhenoster Kop, the storming of Helvetia and the midnight attack on Belfast. As we noted a little further back, he and

his commando had been lying concealed in the Bethal district. His scouts had dogged Morris's column during the day and he now resolved to attack. At 7.30 P.M., with 120 Middelburgers and the owner of the farm as guide, unchallenged by a single sentry, Müller passed through the outpost line and stormed the camp. Fifty men were shot down in the first rush, and the first rush was decisive. Yet there were gallant attempts to stem the rout. Of the Imperial officers, Major Morris, in attempting a rally, was captured. His staff officer, Captain Watson, R.A., shot a Boer and was immediately killed. Of the two officers in charge of the pom-poms, Captain Dyson was stunned by a bullet wound in the head and Captain Miller endeavoured, though in vain, to organise resistance on the outpost-line. The cattle-kraal would have made an excellent central rallying-point, but in spite of the brave personal efforts of Lieutenant Wood, of the Victorians, the men holding it could not be induced to stand, and none of the outlying pickets, who in all nearly equalled the attacking party in numbers, rendered any support. Unmolested, the Boers removed at their leisure the pom-poms, rifles, ammunition and stores, and leaving their prisoners behind, made off.

Significance of Wilmansrust.

Wilmansrust was a salutary lesson. Blood, shortly afterwards, issued stringent orders with regard to the defence of camps at night, and these orders led to a marked improvement. The Victorians, it is pleasant to record, recovered from the shock of this miserable disaster and became, like their comrades of the right wing, excellent soldiers. But lasting mischief had been done. The reverse, trivial as it may appear in relation to the vast theatre of war and the multitudes of troops engaged, could scarcely have occurred at a more unfortunate moment. On June 20, a week after the action, while British attention was still concentrated on Müller and the Bethal district, the long-deferred meeting between the two Boer Governments took place unobserved at the farm Waterval, near Standerton.

The Boer Council of War, June 20.

The Council decides for war.

On the main issue of peace or war, the result was almost a foregone conclusion. The stubborn counsels of Steyn and de Wet were scarcely needed to fortify the Transvaalers.

Kruger's cabled reply had arrived, and its purport was "hold out." Columns were overrunning the veld, but the burghers were growing accustomed to pillage and it was clear that the columns were accomplishing little else. Of the three small collisions which had taken place in the Transvaal since the meeting of May 10, Mooifontein had no influence in either direction, Vlakfontein was regarded as an encouraging success and Wilmansrust turned the scale. It is at moments such as these that the events of the guerilla war are seen in their true proportion. A year's hostilities, a year's ruinous devastation of a future British colony, an addition to the British national debt of something like a hundred millions, hung on the result of this conference, swayed as it was by considerations seemingly so petty. It is idle to stigmatize as blindness and folly the action of these men. Up to a certain point their reasoning was sound. Although overwhelmed by numbers and strategy, they perceived that they still possessed a local and tactical superiority. Therefore they had time on their side. In time they might wear down the patience of their great adversary or profit, as the Spanish partisans had profited, by a diversion from without. These were wild hopes, but men fighting for freedom will always build on wild hopes.

The Boer military plans.

The decision, then, was for war, and a proclamation to that effect was issued to the commandos. In what way to conduct the war was the next question. Here climatic considerations were decisive. For the next three months there would be no grass for the ponies, and grass in plenty was essential to the coherence of the commandos. Complete dispersion was necessary and in accordance with this policy Viljoen was ordered to take Müller and the north-eastern burghers back to their own district. In the meantime, however, there was one hopeful field of enterprise, namely, the Cape Colony, where, although there was little grazing, there was at any rate no devastation, and where the inhabitants to a great extent were friendly. To send down a commando of veterans, under a leader of sufficient authority and energy to convert sporadic brigandage into organised war; here was a promising method of embarrassing the British during the dead

Fresh invasion of Cape Colony planned.

season in the two Republics. The Free State, so its leaders urged, had been working hard in this field for more than six months. It was time for the Transvaal to help. The demand was granted. De la Rey offered to supply the men and Smuts undertook the charge of the expedition, for which preparations were to be made immediately.

The Council breaks up.

The Council of War now broke up. Viljoen started for the north. The Free State leaders, escorted by Commandant Alberts with a guard of Standerton men, and accompanied, but only as far as the Vaal, by De la Rey and Smuts, turned south for their own country. The Transvaal Government resumed its feverish pilgrimage from bivouac to bivouac. There is no better way of continuing the narrative of the winter campaign than by following the adventures of these several parties.

IV

Viljoen's Return to his District.

Viljoen returns to his own district, June 21–27.

Viljoen, in accordance with his orders, joined Müller, who had remained near the scene of the fight at Wilmansrust, concentrated his men to the number of about 600, and with the two captured pom-poms and a small cart-convoy marched north with the object of crossing the Delagoa Railway near Brugspruit. There was nothing to interfere with his march. It is true that Kitchener, on hearing of the reverse, had ordered Blood to divert to the Bethal district all the columns he could spare. But while mobility was so imperfect, these attempts to retaliate always came too late, wearied the columns to no purpose and interrupted other work. Nearly a fortnight elapsed before Blood, with the columns of W. Kitchener and Pulteney and a newly-formed cavalry brigade under Babington and W. P. Campbell,* reached the neighbourhood of Bethal, whence they swept majestically on to Springs. Meanwhile Viljoen had crossed the line, but

* W. P. Campbell's Column:—18th Hussars, 543; 2nd Rifle Br., 587; 53rd Batt. R.F.A., two guns; 14th S.D. R.C.A., one 5-in. gun.

Babington's Column:—19th Hussars, 280; 1st King's R.R.C., 637; 83rd Batt. R.F.A., two guns; 10th Mountain Battery, one gun.

not unscathed. Approaching it on the night of June 26 at a point between Balmoral and Brugspruit, he found himself confronted by the line of block-houses which at that period bordered the railway at intervals of about a thousand yards. Two of these little works Viljoen ordered to be stormed by detachments under Groenwald and his own brother, W. Viljoen. The garrisons, however, had been warned and greeted the assailants with a rifle-fire which a bright moon made very effective. It took twenty minutes for W. Viljoen to subdue one small block-house, bravely defended by only seven men. Groenwald failed altogether at the other. Nevertheless, Viljoen proceeded to pass across his main body, guns and convoy under a heavy fire. The operation was barely half complete when there steamed up an armoured train from Brugspruit in charge of Lieutenant Cusins, R.E. This unwelcome visitor, turning night into day with its search-lights and belching out shrapnel and Maxim bullets, put an abrupt end to the proceedings, which had cost Viljoen 25 casualties and left him with his force divided. On the next evening he adopted different tactics. The force left behind, without attempting to storm the block-houses, forced a crossing near Uitkyk Station; the watchful armoured train again came up, only to be wrecked by a contact mine laid by the notorious train-wrecker, Jack Hindon.

Viljoen's passage of the railway, June 26–27.

Viljoen found his old haunts, the Bothasberg, Tautesberg and Steenkampsberg, in a pitiable state of devastation, though, for the nonce, enjoying a respite from the visits of the British. The respite, however, was brief. East of Lydenburg, destruction had been rife for a fortnight; for Blood had diverted only a part of his force to Bethal and had left Park, Douglas and Benson, under the general control of Spens, to operate in the triangle Lydenburg-Machadodorp-Nelspruit. Some good work was done here, not showy, but thorough; and early in July the same columns moved westward to deal similarly with the Dullstroom and Roos Senekal districts. Viljoen, who had left Müller on the Olifant's River, vainly attempted to offer opposition with the rest of his force; the burghers, weary and insubordinate, refused to stand. Beaten back three times by Benson on July 3, 7 and 11, and driven

Operations of Spens in the north-east, July.

slowly to the west, he finally joined Müller at Laatste Drift on the Olifant's, where he fought a last feeble action. Forced over the river and into the bush-veld, he then gave up the struggle for a while and, leaving Müller to lead the commandos, devoted himself to propaganda and reorganisation.

V

The Raid on the Free State Government.

Further wanderings of the Transvaal Government, June 21–end of August.

Leaving him and his pursuers, let us return to the other members of the Council of War. The Transvaal Government party at first travelled to the Bethal district, only to become involved in Blood's operations. Extricating themselves from this net, they again headed for Ermelo, where they were furnished with a permanent escort of the Heidelberg Town commando. For two months and more they circled unceasingly round Ermelo and at the end of August settled down for a long rest on the Swazi border. The Free State officials, although generally they led a somewhat less precarious life than their colleagues of the Transvaal, were now to suffer a catastrophe. Crossing the Vaal, and entering the Free State in the last days of June, they found themselves once more within the area of drives. Elliot, having refitted at Kroonstad, was sweeping for the second time over the north-eastern district. First it was eastward, by way of Senekal and Lindley, to Harrismith. Thence, wheeling to the north, with Rundle co-operating on his right and Bullock and Garratt (from the Transvaal) acting as buffers to his front, Elliot swept in four * parallel lines down the left bank of the Wilge River. On July 6 De Lisle, with the left flank column, passed through Reitz, finding in the deserted town a document proving that Boers were in the habit of leaving the place when a British column approached and of returning to it when the danger was past. Elliot turned this hint to excellent account. On the 10th, when his entire line was well to the north of Reitz, he ordered Broadwood, who led the right flank column,

The Free State Government returns to the Free State, June 22–July 11.

Broadwood raids Reitz, July 10,

* Broadwood (rejoined after sick leave), Lowe, Bethune, De Lisle.

to double back by a forced night march and take the town by surprise. Broadwood, with 400 men and a pom-pom, carried out this order with skill. But for the loss of touch by a connecting file he would have actually surrounded Reitz by daylight on the 11th; as it was he had to gallop hard for the last two miles and had no time to block the roads leading out of the town. It happened that Steyn himself, his bodyguard under Davel, and all the Free State Government officials,* together with Generals A. P. Cronje and J. B. Wessels, and Field-cornet Steyn (the President's brother), were sleeping in Reitz that night, having left it at De Lisle's approach and reoccupied it when his back was turned. De Wet, unluckily for the Government party, was away at his favourite headquarters, the farm Blijdschap. The slumbers of the President and his friends were sound and careless. When Broadwood's troopers galloped into the town there was a *sauve qui peut*. It was too late. Twenty-nine prisoners, including the whole Government staff, together with Davel, Wessels, Cronje and the President's brother, were captured. Only eight persons escaped—seven men of the bodyguard and President Steyn himself, whose faithful Kaffir cook warned him just in time. Coatless, night-capped, with a halter for a bridle, the President galloped down the street. He was pursued and shot at by a sergeant of the 7th Dragoon Guards; but the Boer pony was fresh and the British charger tired, so that the fugitive made good his escape. He had lost his suite, his papers, his treasury †—everything but his intense hatred of the British invader and his unquenched faith in the eventual triumph of the cause. He soon formed a new Council.

and captures all the members of the Government, except Steyn.

Broadwood at once rejoined his column. Elliot swung round westward by way of Frankfort and Heilbron and reached the railway on July 16. The total results of nearly a month's work, at the cost of three casualties, were 17 Boers killed and wounded, 61 prisoners, 7,000 horses,

Elliot, July 12–16.

* Save J. C. Brebner, the State Secretary, who was away on leave. General C. H. Olivier was afterwards appointed a member of the Executive Council in place of General A. P. Cronje.

† £11,500, mostly in Free State notes, were found in his tent.

7,000 cattle, 6,000 cartridges, 300 vehicles. These figures are an instructive illustration of the relative efficacy of drives as directed against the persons and property of the enemy

VI

The Ride of Smuts to Cape Colony and the great Free State Drive.

Smuts organises the expedition to Cape Colony, July 1–15.

In the meantime, De la Rey and Smuts, the only members of the Council of War to whom an active enterprise was entrusted, had returned to their district, the Western Transvaal. The men destined to take part in the expedition to Cape Colony were now selected and assembled under Smuts in the Gatsrand. They were but 340 in number, divided into four parties under Commandants Van der Venter, Kirster, Bouwer and Dreyer. The adventures of this handful of resolute men forms one of the most interesting and instructive episodes in the whole of the guerilla war. On July 15, when all were assembled and equipped for their long ride to the south, Smuts arranged for the first stage of the march by appointing a rendezvous on the banks of the Vet River, near Hoopstad, where the four parties into which the force was divided, travelling by different roads, were to meet at the end of the month. Van der Venter, Bouwer and Kirster started at once; Smuts himself, with Dreyer and 100 men, remained for the present in the Gatsrand. Just at this moment news of the gathering and a faint inkling of its object reached the British Intelligence. Kitchener at once endeavoured to nip the scheme in the bud. Colonel Henry's column, from Christiana, and Major Paris, with the Kimberley column, were directed to converge upon the Hoopstad district. Garratt was sent to the Losberg, where it was rumoured that Smuts himself had taken up his headquarters. Colonel Western,* coming from Klerksdorp, watched the line of the Vaal from Venterskroon to Coalmine

Part of the expedition starts, July 15.

Kitchener tries to nip it in the bud, July 16–21.

* Western's Column:—Royal Irish M.I., 200; Royal West Kent M.I., 61; Driscoll's Scouts, 422; 1st Oxford L.I., 120; 1st Royal Irish F., 120; 62nd Battery, two guns; one pom-pom ("M" Section).

General J. C. Smuts.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

Drift and Bothaville; and lastly, Colonel Gilbert Hamilton, starting also from Klerksdorp,, made for the Vaal at a lower point, passing through Wolmaransstad. It was like searching for a few needles in a large haystack. Of the five columns, Garratt's only gained any touch with the raiders. Garratt engaged Smuts and Dreyer at Lindeque Drift on the 21st, but on the next day, finding them in a strong position at Buffelshoek and not realising how weak they were, did not press the pursuit and unfortunately did not even keep touch. Paris and Gilbert Hamilton had sharp brushes with local commandos, Paris with Badenhorst and Erasmus in the Hoopstad district, Hamilton with Potgieter, whose laager he captured by a night attack; but neither got wind of the raiders. Of these, the three parties sent in advance reached the rendezvous, the farm Grootvlei, twelve miles east of Hoopstad, on the 21st. Smuts and Dreyer, having thrown off Garratt at Lindeque Drift, rode cautiously westward along the north bank of the Vaal, looking for a chance of evading Western's cordon and joining their comrades. On the 28th they were just to the south of Klerksdorp, and, save for the weak and scattered river-cordon, the coast seemed clear and the chase over. Suddenly there marched out of Klerksdorp and deployed towards the Vaal an imposing array of seven British columns. There was no time to be lost. While deployment was still in progress, Smuts doubled round the right flank column, crossed the river at an unguarded point, and on August 1 joined his comrades at Grootvlei. And now came fresh surprises. Not only were the seven aforesaid columns tramping steadily southward and now close at hand. Rumours were afloat of other columns springing up on every side, crowding in from north, south, east and west and blocking every possible path to Cape Colony or anywhere else. Smuts, in fact, had accidentally become involved in the most extensive and elaborate scheme of operations which Kitchener had yet contrived.

In vain.

Adventures of Smuts in reaching the first rendezvous.

We have seen how, during May and June, the constant tendency had been to manœuvre the Free State columns in larger and larger groups, with frequent accessions from the

General plan of the great Free State drive, July.

Transvaal. In the second week of July, shortly before Smuts's movements had begun to attract attention, Kitchener planned a drive beside which all previous drives were insignificant. Directly or indirectly most of the mobile columns in the Transvaal and Free State were pressed into the combination. The ultimate scene of this great drive was to be the north-western section of the Free State, bounded by the Vaal on the north, the Modder on the south and the two trunk railways on the east and west. This area, according to the theory, was to constitute a "corral" into which Boers from outlying districts were to be swept by a wide outer circle of columns, and then, within the bounds of the "corral" itself, to be driven together and crushed by a picked inner circle. In this final process the main driving momentum was to come from the north. To the south it was hoped that the Boers would find a difficult barrier in the line of Constabulary posts running from Bloemfontein to Petrusburg, and thence, by a recent extension, to Jacobsdal. To the east and west were the two lines of railway, whose defences of late had been greatly strengthened with block-houses at short intervals and a continuous fencing of barbed wire.

First phase of the drive, July.

The first phase was preparatory; the contraction of the outer circle. Beginning with the south, Bruce Hamilton, who had been engaged in clearing the country on both sides of the railway, carried all his troops to the west of the line in the second week of July and posted half of them, under Colonels Rochfort, W. H. Williams and Byng,* in a cordon of four detachments behind the line of Constabulary posts. Here they constituted a second and mobile barrier stretching from Wegdraai Drift on the Riet River to Emmaus. Charles Knox,† with the columns of Pilcher and Thorneycroft, called

Bruce Hamilton.

Knox.

* Rochfort's Column:—I.Y. (9th Bn.), 302; 17th M.I., 331; 17th Battery, two guns; one pom-pom (G Section).

W. H. Williams's Column:—1st M.I., 203; I.Y., 221; 43rd Batt. R.F.A., one howitzer; one pom-pom (D Section).

Byng's Column:—I.Y., 450; South African L.H., 503; 17th Batt. R.F.A., two guns; one pom-pom.

† Since the middle of June Knox had been operating, first in the Hoopstad and Bloemhof districts, then round Ladybrand, and latterly in the extreme south-east, where he had worked down to Bethulie and Aliwal North.

up from far away on the Cape Colony border, prolonged this cordon eastward to the railway by occupying the Fauresmith-Edenburg road; while the rest of Bruce Hamilton's troops, under Colonels Du Moulin and Dawkins,* watched the line of the Orange from Norval's Pont to Ramah, and thus provided a third barrier in rear of the other two. While waiting for the final movement these two classes of troops were not inactive. Their duty was to raid and ravage from their several centres and as far as possible to push into the "corral" all the Boers of the district.

Elliot.

From the east came Elliot. His march to Vredefort Road, after the raid on Reitz, had been planned in conformity with the general design. Now, after a short rest, he swept on westward, skirted the Vaal, and on July 24 reached Klerksdorp, where he stood at a commanding point immediately north of the "corral." At Klerksdorp, which had become a very vortex of activity, Elliot met Fetherstonhaugh's four columns. These, after their vain hunt for Kemp in the early part of June, had marched west to Zeerust. Thence, drawn into Kitchener's grand design, they had swept south for a hundred miles by Lichtenburg to Klerksdorp, with the altogether visionary object of inducing the nimble and wary Boers of the Western Transvaal to quit their native district and step into the trap prepared for them.

July 24.

Fetherston-haugh.

Final arrangements for the drive, end of July.

In the midst of all this far-reaching activity the suddenly organised pursuit of Smuts had been but a side issue. In the last days of July, when the chase was proving fruitless, the pursuing columns were drawn in and, with the exception of those under Paris and Gilbert Hamilton, were allotted stations for the coming drive. Henry was sent to Hoopstad, Garratt and Western were added to Elliot's command. Rawlinson, also, was detached from Fetherstonhaugh's group and placed under Elliot. Thus with his own force divided into four, under De Lisle, Broadwood, Lowe and Colonel Owen, of the 1st Dragoon Guards, Elliot controlled seven columns, and these seven columns were to form the main

Elliot's driving line, July 20.

* Du Moulin's Column:—I.Y., 200; 1st Royal Sussex Regt., 436; 39th Battery, two guns; one pom-pom (N Section).

driving line. It was they that had darkened the horizon for Smuts when he was riding along the Vaal. On that day, July 28th, Elliot had marshalled his columns on the line of the river; his right, under De Lisle, touching the Yzer Spruit, his left, under Rawlinson, at Reitzburg, and between them Lowe, Broadwood and Owen. Garratt was to follow in rear of the left flank in order to deal with any parties of the enemy which might break back. This was the only novelty in the methods employed in the drive. In other respects it was a replica of Bruce Hamilton's movement in June, with much stronger barriers and much greater numbers. Small "stop" columns for the eastern flank were organised at Kroonstad and Vet River Station under Major Pine-Coffin and Colonel Barker. Henry, at Hoopstad, was to perform the same function on the western flank; and, lastly, Plumer was spirited up from a remote corner of the Transvaal, and planted at the south-western corner of the threatened area.

"Stop" columns.

Plumer.

When we last referred to Plumer he was conducting a sweep into the Piet Retief district in the early part of June. At the end of the month he had penetrated as far south as Utrecht, and had thence marched northwards by Amsterdam and Carolina to the Delagoa Railway, which he reached in the middle of July. This was far enough from the centre of attraction, but not too far for Kitchener. Hurried south by rail, Plumer was refitting at Bloemfontein on the 18th and on the 30th, having marched across the base of the "corral," was at Modder River Station, 400 miles from Carolina. This was an example of the strategical mobility of which Kitchener had perfect command. Indeed, the punctual assemblage of this great system of columns showed what a perfect administrative machine the Commander-in-Chief had created. In the execution of the drive the same mechanical perfection was aimed at. Central control was absolute. Elliot, it is true, had a limited control over his own group of columns; but his itinerary and halting-places, like those of other units, were prescribed in advance.

The Boers inside the "corral."

A theoretically perfect trap was now ready. What was within it? It is unlikely that the contraction of the outer circle had swept in any appreciable number of Boers from

other districts, the south, perhaps, excepted. But the local commandos were there, under Vice-Commander-in-Chief Badenhorst, and Commandants P. P. Erasmus, Theunissen, Jacobs, J. Theron and Bester; there were many scattered laagers, scores of farms as yet unraided and vast quantities of cattle and sheep. Lastly, there was Smuts, and it was his presence that makes the drive peculiarly interesting. Two alternatives faced the local men; to evade the columns within the trap or to break through its barriers. If they could save their lives and property by the former means, they had no motive for taking the latter. Smuts had a definite and distant mission, to perform which he was forced to do both things. With his 340 men he was surrounded, without counting the garrisons of Constabulary posts and railway block-houses, by 15,000 British troops spread over seventeen columns, all of them superior and most of them greatly superior to his own force.

The drive, July 29–Aug. 10.

On July 29 the drive began. Elliot's six driving columns marched south in parallel lines; Henry fell into line on the right when the level of Hoopstad was reached; two days later Plumer worked in towards him at right angles; Garratt brought up the rear; Pine-Coffin and Barker watched the left. For thirteen days longer the centripetal movement continued, and on August 10 Elliot reached the Modder, and the drive ended.

Results.

In so far as it was directed against property the results were good. No less than 814 wagons were taken; 186,000 sheep were returned as having been seized or destroyed; 21,000 cattle were driven off the veld. But only seventeen Boers were killed or wounded, and of the 259 prisoners comparatively few were of the best fighting stamp. These were the figures of the drive itself. To the south of the driven area Bruce Hamilton, Knox and the Constabulary had taken, during the last month, two or three hundred prisoners and by hard and incessant work had made a drastic clearance of the region between the Modder and the Orange. Much of it was now a depopulated wilderness.

Escape of the local commandos.

In the meantime what had become of Smuts and the local commandos? The latter, taking the line of least resistance and, refusing to face the barriers, had broken back

through Elliot's line, principally by night. In the daytime Elliot's troops covered a fairly wide though far from a continuous front; at night they concentrated in camps separated by intervals of from seven to ten miles, and through these gaps, in spite of night forays, the commandos slipped. Garratt's supporting column could cover only a narrow belt of country, and, though it captured one entire laager, was powerless to stem the main Boer current. Once again, in short, tactics triumphed over strategy; the man defeated the scheme.

The ride of Smuts to the south, Aug. 1–27.

Strange to say, Smuts, who should have been the most vigilant and wary, came, at the outset, nearest to disaster. Awaiting at Grootvlei the approach of the driving line, he

Action of Grootvlei, Aug. 1.

was attacked on the night of August 1 by Major Shea, of De Lisle's force, with a party of 200 South Australians. This smart and plucky stroke was an example of the best sort of tactical enterprise. The Boers were fairly surprised and lost six men killed, twelve captured and a considerable number of horses. It was a sharp lesson, and Smuts took care that it should not be repeated. Two nights later he found his opportunity, dodged back, gained temporary safety in rear of the driving line and then split his force into two, taking half himself and placing the other half under Van der Venter.

The rendezvous—Zastron.

The rendezvous was to be Zastron, near the Cape Colony frontier. It was Kritzinger's native village and that leader's usual base for forays into the Colony. Van der Venter, for his part, headed east for the railway, stormed an improperly-guarded block-house near Brandfort and crossed the line with slight loss on the night of August 12. At this time there were no mobile columns east of the railway, so that the only obstacle in his southward march was the Bloemfontein-Thaba 'Nchu line of posts. Piercing this without difficulty, he made his way to Zastron. Smuts would have done well to take the same route. Instead, he followed in the wake of Elliot's columns, crossed the Modder at Abraham's Kraal, galloped unscathed through the line of Constabulary posts and then stumbled into a network of columns, to escape from which taxed all the resources of his ingenuity. He penetrated as far south as Springfontein, only to be driven

back nearly to Bloemfontein. Doubling once again to the south, he shook off pursuit for the moment and on August 21 crossed the railway from west to east near Edenburg. Working south-east towards Zastron, he was overtaken near Reddersburg by Rawlinson, to whom he lost 30 prisoners, and again by Major Damant, leading an independent column detached from Bruce Hamilton's force. To Damant he lost four more men and 20 horses, but on the 27th he succeeded at last in joining Van der Venter at Zastron. What with stragglers, killed, wounded and captured, the invading commando was now reduced to 250 men. But the goal was in sight. Fifteen miles away was the Orange River and beyond it Cape Colony.

Smuts reaches Zastron, Aug. 27.

Having brought Smuts to this point, we must turn aside to describe the campaign in the Colony during the previous four months and the situation which existed when Smuts was planning his entry.

VII

The Winter Campaign in Cape Colony

The winter campaign in Cape Colony may be said to have begun in the middle of May with the return of Kritzinger bearing the rank of Assistant Commander-in-Chief and bringing a reinforcement of 500 Free Staters and rebels.* During his fortnight's absence hostilities had languished. Fouché was in the Zuurberg, beating up recruits and awaiting his leader's return; Scheepers, dogged by Henniker, was at Daggaboer's Nek, in the Baviaansberg, between Cradock and Bedford; Malan, with Scobell at his heels, was in the Camdeboo, south-west of Graaff Reinet. None of the three had a large following, and Malan and Scheepers were shedding men fast under relentless hustling from Scobell and Henniker. By the 23rd of May Malan had been driven north into the Richmond district, and Scheepers, with only 100 men left, after a long pursuit by Henniker, had taken Malan's place in the Camdeboo. Maritz and Conroy were causing some slight annoyance in the Calvinia district, but were being dealt with successfully by Settle. Matters, in short, seemed to be

Kritzinger re-invades the Colony, May 16–17,

* See Chapter IX, end.

going well; until on May 16–17, Kritzinger's men, in three separate divisions, were permitted, without a shot being fired, to cross the Orange at Van Tonder's Drift and to join Fouché in the Zuurberg. Hostilities at once received a fresh and dangerous impetus. With Kritzinger came Myburg, Lotter, Van Reenen and Lategan, all of them young, audacious, unscrupulous. Fouché had already been recruiting to some purpose; many young Dutch farmers rode to the rendezvous to offer their services, and in a few days there was a gathering of 1,000 in the Zuurberg.

and concentrates in the Zuurberg.

Colonel Haig, who was controlling the mobile troops in the midlands, at once took steps to break up the gathering, directing Scobell, Crabbe, Gorringe, and Lovat's scouts, under Colonel Murray, to converge upon the Zuurberg, while Monro's column was diverted from the Free State and given the same objective. Kritzinger broke away, and, at the end of the month, gained the snow-bound and almost pathless Bamboes Mountains, Van Reenen alone leaving him and returning to the Zuurberg. Hunted out of the Bamboes by Gorringe and Scobell, Kritzinger crossed the Molteno Railway near Cyfergat, and, swerving sharp to the north-east, on June 2 attacked the strongly-intrenched village of Jamestown, overpowered the town guard and supplied himself with an abundance of horses, ammunition, food and clothing. It was a welcome windfall after a long and exhausting ride. The spoil distributed, Kritzinger dispersed his various commandos to prosecute their mischievous activities throughout the midlands. Van Reenen had been less fortunate. He was surprised in the Zuurberg on June 6 by Colonel Wyndham and the 17th Lancers, and had 23 men captured.

Haig breaks up the gathering, end of May.

Kritzinger takes Jamestown, June 2.

It was now apparent that the position was more serious than it had been at any time since the invasion of de Wet in February. While there was still no sign of a general rising, there was no sign that the Dutch farmers were becoming tired of their friends the raiders. On the contrary, recruiting to the rebel ranks was distinctly on the increase; wherever the bands went they were sure of hospitality, refreshment, a few additional rifles, and, above all, of information. A farmer would ride fifty miles with a warning to a

A serious situation, June.

commando, and that, it was often remarked, was more than most loyal farmers would do for the British. Disaffection in Cape Colony was like a running sore, promising no mortal hurt if due precautions were observed, but, with the least neglect, threatening to infect the whole body.

French appointed to command in the Colony June.

Hitherto the measures taken had been inadequate; but Kitchener now took a step which was a high compliment to Kritzinger and at the same time a clear intimation that a resolute effort was going to be made to stamp out the revolt. This was to give General French the supreme control of operations in the Colony. As a just recognition of Haig's abilities, this officer retained the control of a group of columns, but reported to French. To all who knew French's character and gifts, the step was a guarantee that a strong will, a strong hand, and a clear head could be depended upon to keep the war in the Colony within manageable limits. More than that it was impossible to assume. French himself had yet to prove his aptitude for guerilla war. His last undertaking, the great drive in the Eastern Transvaal, owed such success as it obtained to conditions which did not exist in Cape Colony. In the Transvaal the Boers could be cowed and impoverished by devastation. In the Colony the personal objective was paramount. Stripped of all disguises, the true elements of success stood out clear and plain—speed, cunning, dash and tactical efficiency. This great difference should be constantly borne in mind in comparing the work done in the two republics with the work done in the Colony. If generous allowance must be made for the difficulties met with in the former case, still more generous allowance must be made for French and his troops.

The personal objective.

French's troops.

Taking up his headquarters at Middelburg, French began by organising several new columns. At the end of June the fighting strength of the troops at his disposal was about 5,800, spread over nine columns, of an average strength of 600, and four depôts—Graaff Reinet, Somerset East, Conway, and Steynsburg.* Among the 5,000 mounted troops there

* A small independent column in the remote west under Major Joudwine (Calvinia District) is not included. Joudwine coped with Maritz and Conroy.

were three cavalry regiments (9th, 16th and 17th Lancers), the Cape Police and Cape Mounted Rifles, and about 1,000 Yeomanry, very backward in training. The rest were mainly irregular corps raised in the Colony itself.

Changes in command and organisation.

The oldest of all the columns, namely, the original Colonial Defence Force, under Gorringe, had just been broken up, the troopers having served their time. Gorringe immediately organised a fresh force of Tasmanians, Cape Police and Nesbitt's Horse. Scobell, Crabbe, Crewe and Monro kept the field, but were all weakened by an influx of raw recruits. Henniker, after long service with a column, was given the command of Graaff Reinet,* and Colonel Beauchamp Doran succeeded him in the field. Other new column-commanders were Colonel Wyndham, with the 16th Lancers and some Yeomanry, and Colonel Lund, with Brabant's Horse, some Yeomanry and part of the 9th Lancers. The 17th Lancers were held in reserve at Steynsburg. Although French had absolute control of all these mobile troops, the administrative command of the Colony, including local defence, depôts, lines of communication and that important function, the administration of martial law, remained with General Wynne. The two spheres necessarily overlapped and a certain amount of inconvenience and delay resulted from the dual supremacy. One of Wynne's measures, taken at the end of May, had been to subdivide the Colony into nine new districts,* the old four-fold division,

* *Aliwal North Districts* (under Major-General Hart): Aliwal North, Herschel, Albert.

Eastern Districts (under Colonel Sir C. Parsons): Herschel, Aliwal North, Albert, Molteno, Barkly East, Wodehouse, Glengrey, Queenstown, Tarka, Cathcart, Stockenstrom, Stutterheim, Victoria East, Komgha, King William's Town, Peddie, and East London.

Midland Districts (under Major-General Inigo Jones): Colesberg, Steynsburg, Middelburg, Cradock, Graaff Reinet, Aberdeen, Fort Beaufort, Bedford, Somerset East, Albany, Alexandria, Bathurst, Jansenville, Willowmore, Uniondale, Knysna, Uitenhage, Humansdorp, and Port Elizabeth.

Southern Districts (under Lieutenant-Colonel Burke): Oudtshoorn, George, Mossel Bay, Ladismith, Riversdale, Swellendam, Robertson, Bredasdorp, and Caledon.

Western Districts (under Colonel T. E. Verner): Hopetown, Philipstown, Hanover, Britstown, Richmond, Victoria West, Carnarvon, Murraysburg,

which was both cumbrous and inadequate, being superseded. It will be observed that General Hart held the three important districts which border the Orange; Aliwal North, Herschel and Albert. Hart had under him Major Moore with the Connaught Rangers and Murray with Lovat's Scouts. General Settle, who latterly had been in charge of the old Western District, left South Africa in May on temporary leave of absence, and the huge territory he had controlled was split into four.

Operations in June and July.

French's principal aim, like that of all his predecessors, was to exclude the raiders from the south and to force them northwards over the Orange. At first, however, little progress was made in this direction. During June, owing to the dispersion of the rebel bands, the operations were desultory and disjointed. Kritzinger and Lotter, who held together and headed for the heart of the midlands, were caught up and damaged on the 6th and 17th, on the first occasion by Colonel Lukin, of Scobell's column, near Dordrecht, and on the second, by Monro and Crabbe near Maraisburg. On the other hand, they managed to overwhelm and capture 60 of the Midland Mounted Rifles near Maraisburg on the 21st. After this, Crabbe, with the occasional assistance of other columns, hung on their trail for a whole month, until on July 21, when his troopers were just saddling up after a night spent at Jackalsfontein (twenty miles south-west of Cradock), he was surprised by a sudden attack of the two rebel leaders. Three hundred horses stampeded and Crabbe was left with scarcely a mounted man. Attacked all day, he held his own notwithstanding, and during the night made his way to the railway. Fouché, having directed his career of pillage to the eastward, crossed the Drakensberg on June

Action of Jackalsfontein, July 21.

Beaufort West, Fraserburg, Prince Albert, Sutherland, Worcester, Tulbagh, Paarl, and Stellenbosch.

North-Western Districts (under Major Jeudwine, R.A.): Prieska, Kenhart, Gordonia.

South-Western Districts (under Lieutenant-Colonel Du Cane, R.A.): Calvinia, Van Rhynsdorp, Ceres, Clanwilliam, Piquetburg, and Malmesbury.

Namaqualand District (under Lieutenant-Colonel Shelton): Namaqualand.

The Base (under Colonel Cooper): Cape District.

25 and settled down in the Transkei district, to obtain remounts and rest. Many weeks before, Haig had anticipated such a movement and had urged the Cape Government to establish martial law in this district. The Government had refused, but had undertaken to provide for the defence of the district by local troops and armed natives. These forces, however, were not ready, so that Fouché was undisturbed for ten days and then recrossed the mountains with fresh horses. Making westwards for his old haunts in the Zuurberg and gathering up Myburg and 170 men on his way, he collided, on July 14, with Major Moore's small force of 220 Connaught Rangers M.I. at Zuurvlaakte, between Aliwal North and Jamestown. Moore began with a very spirited attack on Myburg, routing him and capturing his laager. Fouché then came up and the two leaders made a fierce counter-attack on Moore, who at the cost of thirty casualties, held his own against heavy odds until evening fell and the Boers retired. Moore was promptly reinforced by Lovat's Scouts and Monro's column, with the result that by the end of the month Fouché was forced over the Orange.

Action of Zuurvlaakte, July 14.

Meanwhile, Scheepers, Hugo, Lategan, Malan, and other small bands were roaming about in the mountainous district enclosed between the Cape Town and Port Elizabeth railways. It was with the object of pushing the whole gathering northward that Kitchener and French, in the middle of July, planned the first drive in Cape Colony. As usual, a barrier was deemed to be indispensable, and this barrier was to be furnished by the De Aar-Naauwpoort Railway, block-housed for the occasion. At this date, although the railways in the Transvaal and Free State were, more or less, thoroughly block-housed, no line in Cape Colony had as yet been taken in hand. Kitchener, in the midst of his preparations for the great drive in the Free State, travelled down to Middelburg and gave the electrifying order to Colonel Inigo Jones that not only the De Aar-Naauwpoort section, but the whole length of line between Orange River Station and Stormberg, should be block-housed within the space of fifteen days. How smoothly and rapidly block-house construction could now be carried out, and how excellent were the arrangements for

Preparations for the first drive in the Colony, July.

First block-houses on the railway in the Colony, July.

supply and distribution, is shown by the fact that, though, when the orders were issued, there were only sixty sappers available, very few tools, no wires and no blockhouse parts, at the end of the fifteen days the work was finished, the blockhouses erected over 241 miles at intervals of 1,600 yards, fully garrisoned and equipped with wire entanglements, alarm guns and mines.*

The first drive, July 18–24.

On July 18 Lund, Wyndham, Doran, Scobell and Crewe spread out on the line Beaufort West–Graaff Reinet, and marched abreast northward. On the right flank a new column,† organised at Middelburg under Colonel Hunter-Weston, hitherto French's chief staff officer, moved inward as a "stop." This first phase was a comparative failure, all the commandos breaking back, except that of Lategan, who was cleverly surprised at midnight of the 21st by Colonel Lukin and 100 C.M.R., detached from Scobell's column. The surprise was a good parallel to Shea's dashing attack on Smuts in the Free State drive. Lategan lost all his horses and twenty of his men. His commando was completely broken up, and a month later he himself with eighty followers fled across the Orange, where he was roughly mauled by Byng and Plumer.

The second drive.

It was now determined to repeat the drive on a more extensive scale, so as to include in its scope Kritzinger, Lotter and three mushroom gatherings under Botha, Smit and Theron—in fact, the whole of the commandos at present afoot in the midlands. Three new cavalry columns were formed under Colonels Atherton and Alexander and Major Kavanagh.‡

* In five days more sixty additional miles between Naauwpoort and Norval's Pont were completed. Great credit is due to Colonel Inigo Jones, commanding the Brigade of Guards, who was responsible for the whole undertaking, and to his Brigade-Major, Major Granville Smith, as well as to Majors Hawkins and Taylor, and other officers of the R.E., who with small detachments of sappers, drawn from all parts of the country, guided and aided the infantry in the work of construction. The battalions employed were the 1st Coldstream Guards, the 2nd and 3rd Grenadier Guards, the 3rd K.R.R., and 5th Lancashire Fusiliers. Later on, the interval of 1,600 yards was gradually reduced to 200 yards.

† Hunter Weston's Column :—5th Lancers, 366; Prince of Wales's Light Horse, 200; two guns "M" Battery.

‡ Atherton's Column : — 12th Lancers, 480; "Q" Battery, two guns. Alexander's Column :—10th Hussars, 283. Kavanagh's Column :—5th Lancers, 152; Nesbitt's Horse, 113; P.W.L.H., 102; one pom-pom.

First phase, July 29–Aug. 3.

Gorringe took the field again from Stormberg, where he had been refitting. These and the other columns, ten in all, took post on an east and west line no less than 150 miles in extent, from Victoria Road Station to Stormberg Junction. On July 29 they marched south, but on narrow fronts, not in an extended driving line. This first movement was in the nature of a feint, the aim being to get well to the south of the Boer bands, and then to turn to the right-about and pursue in earnest to the north. The ruse, on the whole, was successful; although Scheepers, seeing through it, broke away to the south with 250 men and gave endless trouble in a district where there was no adequate force to stop him. Alexander, with the 10th Hussars, was detached in pursuit, but it was too late. For two months Scheepers roamed with impunity through the extreme southern districts, once reaching Montagu, only 100 miles from Cape Town, sometimes close to the ocean, and rarely even sighted by the columns told off successively to hunt him down.

Second phase, Aug. 3–15.

The other commandos, however, did what they were intended to do, and on August 3, French reversed and extended his front on the line Beaufort West—Pearston—Cathcart and launched his columns in hot pursuit to the north.

Desolation Kop.

How was it possible to exercise any effective control over a line of such vast extent? If the reader will climb in imagination to the summit of Desolation Kop, a few miles west of Graaff Reinet, and stand there by French's side, he will obtain a clue to this problem and at the same time will form some conception of the country over which the British columns were working. The peak—snow-sprinkled now—is the highest eminence in all this part of the midlands. On the Graaff Reinet side the ascent is comparatively easy; but on the west a naked cliff drops sheer into the boulder-strewn Desolation Valley, where baboons are the only living creatures. To the west, kloof behind kloof, intricate and desolate, stretches the Camdeboo, the fastness Scheepers has just left. Further west still, over the valleys of the Salt and Kariega Rivers, Beaufort West may be seen. To the south lies the Karroo desert, bleak and repellent. Northward, the naked

hills rise tier on tier till the dark shoulders of the Compass Berg shut out all beyond. Eastward is the Bankberg, and to the south-east the eye travels nearly as far as Somerset East, seventy miles away. The Kop was one of the principal signalling-stations in the Colony. By heliograph in the day and by flash-light at night, French could communicate, directly or indirectly, with every one of his scattered columns, with a score of garrisons, with armoured trains, with distant block-house lines, and with Kitchener himself.

Kritzinger driven out of the Colony, Aug. 12.

If the strategical advantage was superb, it was little beside the local mobility of the rebel bands. Nevertheless the immediate results of the drive were considerable. By the end of August 80 Boers had been accounted for, and the midlands had been almost cleared. But the great barrier, so rapidly improvised, proved of little service. Lotter, Botha and Theron broke back; Kritzinger, the only leader to pass the barrier, filtered his men through it in small parties between De Aar and Naauwpoort and then, with Gorringe hard on his trail, rode for the Orange. Keen and damaging as the pursuit was, Kritzinger held his lead, and on August 12 gained the Free State side of the Orange, a few miles west of Norval's Pont. Not far away to the north Smuts was beginning his perilous and intricate contest of evasion with the troops of Knox and Hamilton. Scarcely noticed, Kritzinger swerved to the east and on August 15 found himself confronted by the barbed wire and block-houses of the railway. His mode of dealing with the obstacle was characteristic. One man was sent forward to open the gates of a level crossing. This done, the rest, under a hail of bullets, galloped across in single file with wide intervals. As soon as a man was across he opened fire on the block-house, and if a horse was hit the next man in rear picked up its rider. Twelve horses fell, just as driven grouse fall to the sportsman in the butt, but all the burghers, 150 in number, escaped. A few days later Kritzinger reached Zastron. There, as we know, he found the elements for a fresh invasion. Of the Transvaal contingents, Van der Venter had already arrived, and Smuts came in on the 27th. Arrangements were made at once for a raid into the Colony.

He crosses the railway, Aug. 15,

and joins Smuts at Zastron.

VIII

Smuts invades Cape Colony

Kitchener surrounds Smuts and Kritzinger, end of August.

It is instructive to note the effect produced by this small concentration of some 500 Boers between the Orange and the Caledon. A large combination west of the railway, to be controlled by Knox and Hamilton, was abandoned. The railway was crowded with troop-trains and by the end of August Smuts and Kritzinger were surrounded. Colonel Lord Basing, with the Royal Dragoons, was carried 500 miles from the Magaliesberg to Smithfield, where he effected a junction with Damant. Plumer soon afterwards came to the same quarter. Rawlinson was at Bastard's Drift, on the Caledon, and about to move on Zastron. Thorneycroft and Pilcher were near Rouxville. The Orange River, from Bethulie to the Basuto border, was held by Fitzroy Hart, who had at his disposal Western's column, Major Moore and the Connaught Rangers and Lovat's Scouts, under Colonel the Hon. A. D. Murray, besides the normal garrisons of Aliwal North and Bethulie. Nor was this all, for a cordon of block-houses garrisoned by the Highland Light Infantry was now practically complete between Bethulie and the Herschel border. In rear of this barrier and within the limits of the Colony, a reserve of Connaught Rangers was established at Lemoenfontein.

Hart's river line.

Hart's dispositions, early Sept.

But the great river, which de Wet had found so formidable an obstacle in February, was now low. For wagons indeed it was fordable only at a few well-known drifts, but a band of unencumbered horsemen familiar with their ground could cross it at many places. Hart, realising that with the troops at his command it was utterly impossible to guard effectively every yard of the river, had placed his mobile troops on the south bank, where, should an invader cross, they would at any rate be ready for a prompt pursuit. On September 1, just at the most important moment, Kitchener upset this arrangement by telegraphing Hart that he was "to keep the enemy well to the north of the Orange." This meant a transference of the mobile troops, with all their

impedimenta, to the north bank; the drift used being that at Driefontein, 16 miles east of Aliwal North. On September 4, when the move was just completed and Murray's troops were actually on the way to Zastron, news came in that Smuts had crossed the river 13 miles higher up.

Smuts crosses the Orange, Sept. 3.

At Zastron a small exchange of men had been arranged between Kritzinger and Smuts. As guides for the unfamiliar country he was about to visit, Smuts took P. Wessels and a small party; while Kritzinger, in return, took over Dreyer's detachment. Leaving Kritzinger behind at Zastron, to distract the attention of the British columns, Smuts slipped across Rawlinson's front on September 2, scouted the river for a safe crossing-place and on the night of September 3 crossed it at Klaarwater Drift, just within the Herschel border. He was at once attacked by some native levies, led by Major Hook. Throwing them off at a cost of six men and thirty led horses, he rode to the south-west with the object of joining the rebel leader Myburg in the Jamestown district. Hart, at Driefontein Drift, learnt the news of the crossing at 9 A.M. on the 4th. Pursuit, however, now was almost hopeless. As soon as his troops had been transferred to the south bank, Western's men and the Connaught Rangers were put upon the trail, but they did not even sight their quarry.

Capture of Lotter, Sept. 4.

If the rebellion was to be kept alive, Smuts, at this moment, was sorely needed. Kritzinger, Fouché and Lategan for the time had disappeared. Of the minor chieftains, Smit had been driven into the far west, Botha and Theron into the far east, where they were being ceaselessly hustled by Doran and Kavanagh. Scheepers was isolated in the far south. There remained Lotter, and it so happened that on the night when Smuts first bivouacked in the Colony, Lotter ended his career. As we have already recounted, he had broken back through French's line in the course of the great northward drive. On August 10 he had snapped up a party of French's Scouts near Bethesda Road and on the night of the 15th had gained the Rhenosterberg, and on the 17th Spitzkop, south of the Bankberg. Here he parted with Botha and Theron, and began a long duel of ingenuity with his old antagonist, Colonel Scobell. Scobell at last obtained the

reward of his untiring energy. Lotter was heading north in the early days of September, and on the night of the 4th, with 140 men, laagered at Bower's Hoek, in the Bankberg; Scobell, pretending to lose touch and shrouded in a friendly rainstorm, took his men round to Pietersburg, whence he made a midnight raid on the laager from the direction in which he was least expected, the north. The surprise was absolute; but Lotter and his men were campaigning with ropes round their necks, and for a while fought desperately. No less determined was the assault of the 9th Lancers and Cape Mounted Rifles, Lord Douglas Compton's squadron and Captain Purcell's company bearing the brunt of the action. 46 Boers fell and 18 British troopers before Lotter and the rest surrendered.*

Cape Colony aflame again, Sept.

Scobell's success would have appeared in the light of a brilliant climax to the winter campaign in the Colony had it not been preceded twenty-four hours before by the invasion of Smuts. Ground won in the last month was instantaneously lost. The midlands were soon swarming with rebel bands. Scheepers, now reinforced by Theron, redoubled his activity in the south. Myburg, who had been hiding in the north-east, took the field as soon as Smuts appeared in his district. His old comrade Fouché soon rejoined him from the Free State. Though the rigour of martial law had been greatly increased, treason still spread. In short, French had to begin the struggle anew. To help him Kitchener had already thrown into the Colony troops he could ill spare, and throughout the winter this exhausting drain had been steadily on the increase. There had been a large accession of cavalry in July. The columns of Pilcher and Western were now borrowed from the Free State and in the middle of September French had in the field, exclusive of local defences forces, 9,000 mounted troops.

* Lieutenants Wynn and Neilson, of the 9th Lancers and Lieutenant Bowers of the Cape Mounted Rifles displayed marked gallantry. Lotter was condemned to death under martial law and executed.

IX

The Proclamation of August and its Sequel

In the meantime, what progress had been made in the main theatre of war? Were the rigours of the winter bringing the Boers to reason? It will be remembered what high hopes had been built on those rigorous conditions, and these hopes were not easily overthrown. It is true that the result of the Boer Council of War, which soon became public, was another disappointment; but it was always possible that the burghers might refuse to obey their chiefs, and the lists of captures which continued to pour into head-quarters lent colour to this supposition. If the chiefs themselves could be intimidated before the end of the winter, the long-deferred collapse might become a reality. It was with ideas such as these, though in a far from sanguine spirit, that Kitchener, at the instance originally of the Natal Government and with the approval of Milner and the Home Government, made his first and last attempt to end the war by a minatory proclamation. Dated August 7, and issued while the great Free State drive was still in progress, it began by giving, in the form of a solemn legal preamble, an account of the military situation which must have seemed strangely unconvincing to the Boers, and which, it must be confessed, was replete with unconscious humour. The fourth paragraph in particular, where the Boers were informed that they were not only few in number but had lost nearly all their guns and munitions of war and their proper organisation, and were therefore incapable of carrying on regular warfare, was a strange tissue of half-truths and perverted logic. It might have been answered that the reduction of numbers had gone hand in hand with aggressive vigour; that the loss of guns, so far from being a weakness, had inspired more effective tactics; that while the British suffered from an excess of organisation, the Boer organisation, if not "proper," was eminently suited to its purpose; and that whether the hostilities were called regular or irregular was not of much

The proclamation of August 7.

account. The operative part of the proclamation demanded the surrender of all Boers before the date of September 15 under pain of certain stringent penalties. These penalties were of two sorts. Government officials, commandants, field-cornets, and "leaders" were to be banished for ever from South Africa; burghers were to be rendered chargeable for the cost of their families' support in the British camps, the charge to be levied on their property and land.

Raids.

The immediate results of the proclamation were not encouraging. Botha, Steyn and de Wet all sent defiant replies, and among the burghers at large there was a sullen silence. Meanwhile the columns, worked by Kitchener at the highest possible pressure, endeavoured to supply the missing arguments for submission. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the operations is the sterility of drives and the relative fertility of raids. In the latter class of operation the whole army was growing more proficient. In order to encourage the tendency, it was about this time that Kitchener formed a small number of special columns, composed expressly with a view to mobility, to which he gave a tolerably free hand and a purely personal objective. Such columns were those under Colonels Rimington, Garratt, Benson, Sir John Dartnell and Major Damant. They roved about the country, projecting raids, generally by night, against the most accessible of the numerous small laagers in which the Boers were now dispersed. Although, as we shall see, their efforts met with considerable success, in one case with brilliant success, it was noticeable that the burghers captured, like those taken in the drives, were not generally of the best stamp. The influential leaders and the toughest men for the most part remained unapproachable.

Special mobile columns, July–Aug.

Kitchener's general instructions, Aug. 31.

It was not only by the formation of special columns that Kitchener endeavoured to increase the striking-power of the army. On August 31 the following instructions were issued to every column in the field:—

"The enemy are now so reduced in numbers and dispersed that greater mobility is required to deal with them. Each column should therefore organize within itself well-mounted and lightly-equipped bodies of picked officers and men prepared to go

long distances with a minimum of transport. The rate of captures can only be maintained by the more extended action of extremely mobile troops freed of all encumbrances, whilst the remainder of the column clears the country and escorts transport."

The spirit of these instructions might well have been imported into those issued seven months earlier when French was beginning the first great drive. The ideal might have been unattainable, but it was the right ideal. Issued now, and in their present form, the instructions, excellent so far as they went, betrayed Kitchener's disposition to view the war mainly as a war of attrition and not as a war which might be shortened, should opportunities arise, by decisive encounters in the field. It was not only to "maintain the rate of captures" that mobility was requisite. It was requisite on every military ground and for every military emergency, and it had been just as requisite on the first day of the war as it was now.

Miscellaneous operations in the Free State, Aug.–Sept.

Let us glance first at operations in the Free State. Kritzinger was pinned to the south-eastern corner and driven to make a minute sub-division of his small force, but he was far from being suppressed. The south-west was quiet, with the stillness of desolation, broken only by the irruption of an occasional band from Cape Colony, such as that of Lategan. In the middle of September Bruce Hamilton was still patrolling this district, but the last incident of note was on August 25, when Colonel Lowry Cole raided the laager of Munnik Hertzog at Liebenberg's Pan and took fourteen prisoners. Elliot's columns had had little rest. No sooner was the drive to the Modder finished than Kitchener planned another, this time directed against the following of Commandants Haasbroek and Froneman. The idea was to form a driving line of Elliot's four columns between the railway at Glen and the Basuto border at Ladybrand; and thence to drive to the north-east, pushing the Boers over the Wittebergen and into the Brandwater Basin, where Rundle posted Campbell's column to receive the expected fugitives. To bar the north, Barker and Pine-Coffin co-operated from Winburg, and Spens, with a brigade formed of his own

column and those of Rimington and Wilson,* from Senekal. The movement, which lasted from August 18 till September 6 was a failure; for Haasbroek declined to enter the trap and slipped through Spens's fingers with the loss of a convoy and a few men. A similar movement by the same troops starting from Winburg on September 10 was somewhat more successful, in that De Lisle galloped down a convoy and Campbell, from within the Basin, made some substantial captures. Among the minor operations, Rimington carried out, during July and August, a number of small raids in the Lindley and Heilbron districts. Many were directed against de Wet and the Government laager, but never with success. Garratt, having in August made several successful forays in the north-west, crossed the Vaal on the 21st and made further captures in the Losberg and Gatsrand.

Beginning of the cross-country block-house system.

Like de Wet in the Free State, Botha, De la Rey and Viljoen in the Transvaal continued the policy of dispersion and evasion. Powerless as yet to defeat this policy, Kitchener nevertheless, unsuspected and scarcely challenged, was laying the foundations of the great system which by infinitely slow degrees led to the final triumph. We have already illustrated the rapid progress which had been made in block-house construction. Until July the system was confined to the railways; but in July the idea first took definite shape of throwing block-house lines across country, and thus creating fenced areas of manageable size within which the Boers could be dealt with piecemeal. It is important to note that these lines almost invariably followed roads, which thus became to all intents and purposes as safe as railways. In other words, a great number of additional lines of communication were opened up and secured, and the striking power of the army proportionately increased. The first object to which the new system was applied was the formation of a protected area around Johannesburg and Pretoria; and the first line to be constructed, running from Breedt's Nek in

Map, end of Chapter xiv.

The protected area in the Transvaal.

* Lt.-Col. Wilson's column had been brought down from Pietersburg (N. Transvaal), where it had been operating for four months. It consisted of 400 Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, one company Gordon Highlanders, a few of the 12th M.I., and the Bushveld Carbineers. Spens had hitherto been working under Blood in the north-east Transvaal.

the Magaliesberg and thence along the Mooi River to Frederikstad on the western branch railway, cut off a substantial slice of the Western Transvaal, and afforded protection to the mines. Passing through the intrenched camp at Naauwpoort, and providing a safe line of supply, it made that stronghold a genuinely independent base of operations. On the north the line was linked up to Pretoria by a subsidiary line running along the Magaliesberg, and on the south it was linked up to the trunk railway by a line, begun in August, from Potchefstroom to Kopjes Station (Free State). To the south-west the Potchefstroom-Klerksdorp section of the branch railway, supplemented by a short block-house line to the Vaal, enclosed a small additional wedge of De la Rey's territory. Thus far in the scheme of defence block-house lines exactly similar to those on the railways were employed. But on the east the protection was of a different character. It consisted of a cordon of fortified Constabulary posts similar to that already established across the centre of the Free State, and designed to serve similar purposes. The posts, which were planted several miles apart at convenient strategic points, ran from Eerstefabrieken on the north (where they were linked up to Pretoria by the Delagoa Railway) through Springs and Heidelberg to the Vaal, and thus protected a comparatively narrow strip of the Eastern Transvaal.

Contrast between block-houses and Constabulary posts.

The two rival systems thus included in the same protective scheme were not destined to be rivals for long. In this realm of military thought ideas, at first confused, were rapidly crystallising. It was recognised that the posts represented an illogical attempt to combine incompatible functions. Operating the "area system," that is to say, acting as centres for active clearing work, they were useful; as affording protection to a line of communication they were also useful, though very expensive in mounted troops; as a physical barrier to the enemy they were valueless. On the other hand, the chain of small block-houses, planted at very close intervals, connected by barbed wire and garrisoned solely by infantry, represented one idea alone, that of passive defence. The chain gave perfect protection to

convoys travelling along a road. It was not indeed by any means a perfect physical barrier, but it was far superior to the line of posts, and it was the best that could be devised. The posts henceforth were confined to their proper sphere. It is true that the cordon just described was, like the Free State cordon, maintained and pushed forward gradually as the country behind was reclaimed; but no new cordons of the same sort were initiated. Instead, the Constabulary were employed in manning interior sets of posts within areas already enclosed by block-houses; for instance, in the Gatsrand and Scheerpoort valley. Here they worked the "area" system pure and simple. But for the most part the work of sweeping clean enclosed areas was done by mobile columns.

Enclosure and exclusion in the Transvaal.

The Boers viewed the beginnings of the block-house system with complete indifference. No organised resistance was offered to construction, and only petty and sporadic resistance to the work of exclusion. By the middle of September a "protected" area some eighty miles square was tolerably safe. This result was due to the efforts of Allenby and Kekewich, who worked on the Magaliesberg; of Lord Basing, who with the Royal Dragoons covered the construction of the Breedt's Nek-Frederikstad line; of General Barton (O. C. Pretoria), who cleared the Hekpoort Valley; of Garratt, to whose operations on the Losberg we have already alluded; and of the South African Constabulary, who formed an interior system of posts in that neighbourhood.

Operations in Western Transvaal, Aug.–Sept.

Outside the pale, however, the Boers were still masters of the situation. In the west, the Zwartruggens was still a hornet's nest. Liebenberg, wandering round Tafel Kop, had been hunted in vain by Gilbert Hamilton; further south De la Rey and Vermaas had eluded the untiring efforts of Methuen and Fetherstonhaugh. Up to the end of August only one noteworthy success had been scored. This occurred in one of the many sweeping movements along the Vaal. In the course of it Colonel Ingouville-Williams, hearing when near Wolmaransstad that a convoy under Vermaas was trekking in the neighbourhood, galloped it down with

his mounted men, taking 65 wagons and 18 prisoners. As a feint he had sent his own convoy in a different direction. This device, imitated from the Boers, was beginning to be used more generally by British leaders. The winter campaign in the west closed, as the summer campaign had closed, with a combined movement of all the available mobile columns. It was directed against Kemp in the eastern part of the Zwartruggens, and at its climax on September 1 Allenby, Kekewich, Hickie, Williams, Gilbert Hamilton and Methuen had formed a circle round his lair at Roodewal. The weakest sector of the circle was the west; for on the north and east the passes of the Magaliesberg were all held and to the south was a plain which it was unlikely Kemp would enter. Methuen and Hickie stood on the west, but with too few men to guard it. Kemp, with all the best fighting men, slipped between them, leaving about 180 *voetgangers* and stragglers to be picked up by the columns. Four days later—and this was an ominous symptom of revival—Kemp, reinforced by De la Rey, was turning the tables on Methuen by attacking him on his way to Zeerust in the bush-clothed valley of the Marico River. The bush, too thick for proper deployment, was infested with Boer riflemen; the ox-transport was a dangerous burden, and, to make matters worse, a gun stuck in a spruit for four hours. Methuen and his Yeomanry, whom he had infected with his own spirit, were equal to the occasion. Forty men, chiefly of the Welsh companies, were killed or wounded in a fight which, after Vlakfontein, was the severest as yet experienced by any of the new Yeomanry.

Action of Marico River, Sept. 5.

Over most of the Eastern Transvaal, Blood's theatre of action, a period of stagnation had followed the exciting days of Mooifontein and Wilmansrust. Column after column had been withdrawn to other regions. Allenby had gone in June; Plumer, E. Knox, Rimington, Bullock, Garratt and Spens in July; Colville, Pulteney and Douglas in August. Blood had thrown nearly the whole of his diminished force into the north-east. We broke off the narrative here in the middle of July at the point when Viljoen, after a final rout on the banks of the Olifant's River, had left Muller to rally the

Depletion of the Eastern Transvaal, July-Aug.

burghers and had gone off himself on a tour of reorganisation.*

W. Kitchener *versus* Muller in the north-east, July–Aug.

Muller rallied 300 men of the Middelburg and Johannesburg commandos and settled down in the Blood River valley. Here, for once, he was caught napping. At Blaauwbank, on July 29, he was surprised by Walter Kitchener, lost 32 prisoners and one of the pom-poms taken at Wilmansrust, and was once more driven west to the Olifant's.

Action of Crocodile Drift, July 30.

At Crocodile Drift, in a jungle of thick thorn-scrub, there was a blind and confused action, in which men were captured and recaptured several times over, the upshot being that Muller was forced over the Olifant's by weight of superior numbers. A fortnight later, after an abortive combination of all Blood's columns upon the Blood River valley, W. Kitchener formed a strong flying column of the 18th and 19th Hussars and the 4th M.I., and made another descent upon Muller. The bush was thick and intelligence bad.

Action of Vrieskraal, Aug. 16.

On August 16 at Vrieskraal, near the Elands River, the 19th Hussars fell into an ambush laid by Muller and before they could be extricated had five of their number killed and 26 captured. Muller made off and now enjoyed a long immunity from attack. Park, W. P. Campbell and W. Kitchener continued to operate for the rest of the winter in the neighbourhood of Roos Senekal and Dullstroom, but without marked success. Still, there were few disturbing signs to be observed in the north-east. If the fiery Muller could always command a small following, Viljoen's authority, never very great, was rapidly waning. Among his subordinates jealousies and feuds were rife. It was becoming plain, in fact, that the burghers of this district would never again unite for common action.

Beyers in the far north, May–Aug.

The far north presented much the same aspect. Since the capture of Pietersburg in April, Beyers had been unable to infuse any strong offensive spirit into the burghers of this distant region. The Zoutpansberg had been thoroughly cowed as early as the middle of May, when Lieut.-Colonel

* At the end of this tour he collected a few hundred burghers of the district north of Lydenburg, marshalled them in two divisions under Piet Moll and David Schoeman, and led them across the Delagoa Railway near Crocodile Poort. On Aug. 6, at M'Piana Fort, north of the Sabi River, he overwhelmed a detachment of Steinacker's Horse.

Grenfell, with a wing of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts under Lieut.-Colonel Colenbrander, the 12th M.I., and some infantry and guns, had penetrated as far north as the village of Louis Trichard, sixty-five miles beyond Pietersburg, and operating in the bush veld which surrounded the little settlement, had made some large captures and received the surrender *en bloc* of 150 burghers under Commandant Van Rensburg. The Waterberg, where Beyers himself was generally to be found, proved far more difficult to subdue. Grenfell, Colenbrander, Lieut.-Colonel Wilson (commanding the second wing of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts*) and a small force of M.I. under Major McMicking, worked hard in the district from the latter part of May onwards. At first they met with considerable success. Zandrivierspoort, one of Beyers' principal strongholds, was occupied at the end of May and made a centre for several very productive raids. Latterly, however, captures had been meagre. But although Beyers and his bands, roaming in the bush country, were able to avoid contact, there was nothing to show that they would ever concentrate for another distant expedition like that which had brought them to Nooitgedacht.

Botha in the south-east, July–Aug.

It was otherwise in the south-east. Over the militant commandos of the high veld Botha wielded firm control. As late as August he had dismissed one of his hitherto trusted lieutenants, General Tobias Smuts, on the ground that he had burnt Bremersdorp, the principal village of Swaziland, in defiance of express orders against such destruction. He was now employing the last of the dead winter months in preparing for an enterprise of some magnitude. There was scarcely anything to interfere with these preparations. From the end of July onward, save for a brief incursion in the early days of August by Colonels Colville and Stewart,† only one British column operated in the high veld, namely, that under Colonel Benson. This column, however, was an important exception. A few more, operating as skilfully and energetically in the same districts, might very well have thwarted Botha's plans. There was nothing new in Benson's method,

Benson's column.

* Wilson (see page 324) was transferred to the Free State in August.

† Lt.-Col. H. K. Stewart ("Bimbashi") led the Johannesburg M.R.

which may be described in two words as that of night raiding. All British leaders had realised that the best way of catching a commando at a disadvantage was to march for it by night and attack it at dawn. The Boer detested this method. Once in the saddle, rifle in hand and a full bandolier buckled round him, he was more than a match for the British trooper; pounced on while still in laager, he was liable to panic. Moreover, there was in every laager at this period a proportion of dismounted burghers, who fell an easy prey to such raids. To carry out a good night raid several things were essential; a dashing leader, thoroughly efficient mounted troops, and above all, excellent local intelligence. Benson's intelligence officer was Colonel Woolls-Sampson, who used trained native and Boer scouts and gained his information mainly from the kraals. His unrivalled knowledge of the Kaffirs, of the country and of the Boer habits, when wedded to Benson's fearlessness in execution, constituted a brilliant partnership which was to last for three months. Woolls-Sampson had been working in Blood's district since April, and already had done good service; but it was not till near the end of the winter that any of Blood's columns reached a standard of efficiency high enough for systematic night raiding. Benson's force was now a reliable weapon, and its colonel was a born guerilla leader. He and Sampson proceeded to carry out their demoralising system of warfare.

Benson's night raids, Aug.–Sept.

On July 29 the column * left Wonderfontein for Carolina and Ermelo. On August 5 and 15, two long night marches to Tweefontein and Kopje Alleen resulted in the surprise and capture of 60 burghers and their wagons. Then there came a check. Symptoms of unusual activity were noticed in the district, and on the 20th work was interrupted by disquieting news from Bronkhorst Spruit Station, 90 miles away to the west. This was to the effect that a concentration of several hundred Boers had been accidentally discovered about 20 miles south of that station by a patrolling party of S.A.C. and Morley's Scouts under Captain Wood. With admirable pluck Wood had rushed upon the Boers, who, before they

Wood's plucky attack on a mysterious Boer force, Aug. 20.

* 18th M.I.; 19th M.I.; 2nd Scottish Horse; Eastern Transvaal Scouts; 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

could recover from the shock of the surprise, lost 23 men killed, a large number wounded and 11 taken prisoner. Then, however, they had collected their wits and, pursuing Wood's gallant little force towards the railway, had succeeded in regaining their prisoners, and in taking a few from Wood. When the news reached Pretoria, Kitchener at once sent out from Springs a column under Colonel Bewicke-Copley, and ordered Benson to close in from the east. But before the co-operation could take effect the mysterious Boer force had disappeared in the south-east. Benson then resumed his raids. On August 31, at Kromdraai, and on September 10, 15 and 16,* in the neighbourhood of Carolina, after night marches varying from thirty to forty miles, he surprised laagers and made his column a terror to the district. Here we must leave him for the present. Hitherto, good as his work was, it had affected only a small corner of the high veld. Louis Botha's scheme went forward undisturbed.

Blood returns to India.

It is necessary to add here that Benson's superior, General Blood, returned in the middle of September to his command in India. If he can scarcely be said to have bettered his high reputation, it must be remembered that in a field so widely different from India, his gifts had had little scope. He had come to South Africa when the anti-guerilla army was new and inefficient. He left when it was just beginning to harden to its work. In the meantime, like some other senior men under Kitchener's masterful sway, he had found that his responsibility was very limited, while the troops at his disposal had been dwindling. As we have pointed out before, the column, not the group of columns, was now the real unit. For column-work he lacked youth and alacrity, and naturally lost enthusiasm.

Failure of the proclamation.

As the winter drew to its close the failure of the proclamation of August 7 became more and more apparent. It was indeed a *brutum fulmen*, discharged under a false conception of the Boer strength and spirit and embodying threats which could never be carried into effect. From every point of view its promulgation was a serious error, leading in the future to doubts and inconsistencies of the most deplorable

Numbers and strength of the Boers, Sept.

* At Pullen's Hope, Tweefontein, and Middeldrift.

kind. For military purposes the Boers were stronger at the end of the winter than they had been at the beginning. This fact was far from being appreciated by the British authorities. Officially estimated at 15,500 in May, including rebels, and subjected to a monthly reduction of about 2,000, the "Boers in the field" (to use the somewhat vague official expression) should in the middle of September have dwindled to 6,500. This, of course, was very wide of the mark. In four and a half months 9,000 men no doubt had been eliminated; but this figure, besides including a large proportion of incapables and skulkers who rarely or never "took the field," should have been deducted from a total nearly treble as large, leaving a balance of about 35,000, in which the proportion of weak men was relatively smaller and the proportion of stalwarts relatively greater, and, not only greater, but more formidable.

Remarkable progress in the British Army, May–Sept.

The British army, too, had grown more formidable. In every military acquirement, but especially in the ability to ride long distances, remarkable progress had been made by the new mounted troops. The tone everywhere was good. If the defects of the drive had been thrown into stronger light than ever, the increasing proficiency in raids showed that enterprise had grown and thriven notwithstanding.

Its significance.

Was it a specialised form of enterprise, fostered by the peculiar conditions of the winter campaign, or did it signify something more? Capable, in Kitchener's words, of "maintaining the rate of captures," would it, tested by far severer standards, broaden into an aggressive impulse powerful enough to vitalise the somewhat lifeless machinery which centralisation had called into being? Could it take expression in field tactics like those of Kemp at Vlakfontein, in rides like that of Smuts from the Gatsrand to Cape Colony, in victories similar in kind but greater in degree to that gained by Scobell over Lotter? Such were the questions which awaited solution when the Boers once more took the offensive and courted conflicts in the open field.

CHAPTER XII

BOTHA'S ATTEMPT TO INVADE NATAL

(September–October, 1901.)

I.

The Spring Revival

The spring revival.

In the second week of September the first spring rains began to fall and the veld, parched by the keen winter winds and blackened by the ravages of fire, responded, as if by magic, to the quickening influence. As if by magic, too, a quickening impulse ran through the veins of the burghers. There was a general recrudescence of the war. Within a week of September 15, when the term of grace expired, four small reverses befell the British arms; within a fortnight, further severe defensive actions were fought in regions so far apart as the Zwartruggens and the Zulu border; and at the end of six weeks the spring revival culminated in a peculiarly sad disaster in one of the most promising fields of British effort.

Boer strategical purpose.

So far as any strategic purpose connected these events, it was the same purpose which had actuated Botha and de Wet eight months earlier—that of simultaneous diversions towards Natal and Cape Colony. Half of the plan then conceived, Botha's invasion of Natal, had fallen through completely. This time Botha determined to carry it into effect. The other half was already partly accomplished; for Smuts, with his little band of picked men, had broken into the Colony and was marching into the midlands. Kritzinger, with another picked band, was intended to follow Smuts. Lastly, it was dimly conceived that Botha himself, having cut through Natal, working what mischief he could, might

also enter the Colony by way of Griqualand East. The whole scheme, like all the guerilla schemes in so far as they aimed at any decisive military success, was somewhat unreal. The main object was to vindicate the contempt shown for the proclamation by a practical demonstration of strength and spirit. This could best be attained by one resolute diversion, which should attract the bulk of the British columns and permit a local offensive in the denuded districts.

II

Botha's March upon Natal

Botha concentrates for the invasion of Natal, Aug.–Sept.

There was some irony in the circumstance that Natal, whose Government had prompted the proclamation, became the objective of this resolute diversion. Botha had been preparing for his expedition since the middle of August. At meetings held in various parts of the high veld the burghers had been exhorted to join in the enterprise. The point of concentration was the farm Blaauwkop, near that old storm-centre, Ermelo. Hither, at the end of August, came small bodies of good fighting-men from the Bethal, South Middelburg, Ermelo, Carolina and Standerton commandos, to the number of about 1000. Such was the explanation of the unusual activity which had been observed when Benson began his raids. It was, in fact, a band of the Bethal and Middelburg men on their way to the appointed *rendezvous* into which Captain Wood's small party had accidentally stumbled.* On the way southward from Ermelo to the Natal frontier, Botha's little force was to be progressively strengthened by further local levies, first from Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief, then from Utrecht, lastly from Vryheid. In the meantime, the men left in the high veld, including the whole of the Heidelberg and South Pretoria commandos, which took no part in the expedition, were to watch the British movements in that quarter and create what diversions they could. During his own absence, Botha gave Ben Viljoen a sort of deputy-control over all the Eastern Transvaal and

Map, p. 358.

* See p. 330.

told him to "act strongly."* On September 7, the first spring rains having given the signals for movement, Botha, with the nucleus of his force, marched south from Blaauwkop, heading for Piet Retief.

Botha marches south, Sept. 7.

Rumours of the contemplated raid had been current for some time past, and specific warning was given to Kitchener of the concentration at Blaauwkop. But the measures taken to thwart Botha were of an inadequate nature. Since a raid is nothing if not swift, pursuit is nothing if not equally swift. It became apparent from the first that anything in the nature of sustained speed at a distance from a railway could not be expected. The columns moved at the rate of ox-transport, and since the weather was bad, that rate was exceedingly slow. On the 8th, the day after Botha had started, two columns under General Walter Kitchener and Colonel W. P. Campbell, controlled by the former officer, left Wonderfontein and marched south towards Ermelo. On the 9th, Colonel Colvile's column marched eastward from Standerton towards Amsterdam, and on the same day Colonel Garratt, who had been summoned away from the Western Transvaal, marched east from Wakkerstroom. About the same time, the first attempt was made to despatch troops from Natal itself.

Kitchener despatches four columns against Botha, Sept. 8–9.

For nearly a month past rumours of a Boer raid had been circulating in Natal, and as early as the second week in August Kitchener had strengthened Hildyard with two mobile columns from the Eastern Transvaal, Colonel Pulteney's† and the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, under Lieut.-Colonel H. K. Stewart. Two expeditions into the Vryheid district, the second ending on September 5, did little more than verify the fact that the various wards of the Utrecht and Vryheid commandos were mobilising for

The situation in Natal, Aug.–Sept.

* In a letter dated September 12 from Piet Retief. The choice of Viljoen as deputy was strange, for he had quarrelled with Muller, was losing influence in the north-east and had none in the south-east. Moreover, as other letters prove, he was at this time being severely reprimanded by Botha for having engaged in independent communications with General Blood and Lord Kitchener.

† Pulteney:—Victorian Mounted Rifles (formerly with Beatson), 8th Hussars (two squadrons), R. Dublin Fusiliers M.I., four guns, L Section pom-poms.

action of some sort. Both columns returned to Dundee. Just at this moment the command in Natal changed hands. On September 4, General Hildyard returned to England on leave of absence and General Lyttelton, who had been on leave since April, took his place. Two days later Lyttelton received his first specific warning of the raid. What was Botha's objective? Here rumours differed, the central Intelligence indicating Dundee, the Natal Intelligence Wakkerstroom and Volksrust. For the moment favouring the latter view, Lyttelton railed up Pulteney to Volksrust on the 8th–11th with orders to march to Wakkerstroom. But Dundee was not neglected. Gough's Mounted Infantry* were transported thither from Kroonstad, arriving on the 13th, and on the 15th and 16th Gough and Stewart were sent to the frontier at De Jager's Drift. A day or two later the Western Transvaal was further depleted by the abstraction of Allenby's column and its despatch by rail to Dundee.

The Natal command changes hands, Sept. 4

Lyttelton's first steps, Sept. 8–11.

Botha meanwhile was steadily advancing. By the 11th, having now marched sixty miles from his starting-point in very rainy weather, he was at Rooikraal, between Piet Retief and the eastern extremity of the Slangapiesberg. Here the Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief contingents joined him, and here, strategically, he entered a dangerous trap; for that narrow strip of open country between the Swazi mountains and the Slangapiesberg was the only easy means of access to his goal and the only easy outlet for return. The five British columns now in the field were already out of the hunt. Pulteney had scarcely reached Wakkerstroom by rail. W. Kitchener was just approaching Ermelo, where he lost all communication with the outside world and where, under the impression that Botha had not left the high veld, he wasted more than a week, gutting the remains of the town and clearing neighbouring farms. Colville, also cut off from communication and also occupied in the secondary work of collecting families and prisoners, plodded steadily on his appointed track to Amsterdam, which he reached on

Botha enters a trap, Sept. 11.

British columns already out of the hunt.

* 585 officers and men, under Capt. (local Lt.-Col.) H. De la P. Gough (16th Lancers).

the 19th, having crossed Botha's track when the spoor was many days old. Garratt, after several vain efforts to gain touch with Colville, with whom he had been ordered to co-operate, had to turn back to Volksrust for supplies, but not before he had learnt the news of Botha's march from Rooikraal and had forwarded a report of it to Lyttelton.

Botha reaches the Pivaan, Sept. 12–14.

On the 12th Botha left Rooikraal; on the 13th he was some miles south of Luneburg, and on the 14th he reached Frischgewagd on the Pivaan River. Here, or hereabouts, he was met by the Utrecht men, who had been ordered, in a letter written twelve days earlier from Ermelo, to concentrate at Pivaan's Poort, hard by. On the other hand, the heavy weather had already told severely on his horses, so that a certain number of his original force had to be left behind. From Frischgewagd Botha sent word in advance to General Cherry Emmett that he proposed to strike at Dundee, and that Emmett, with the men of Vryheid and Utrecht, was to form the advanced guard.

Botha reaches Blood River Poort, Sept. 17.

In the meantime Botha's strength, movements and intentions were matters of mere conjecture at Lyttelton's headquarters. Reports through the ordinary channels of native intelligence dribbled in from day to day; but the ordinary channels of intelligence were altogether inadequate. By the 14th, however, when Garratt's report came in, it was clear that Botha's objective was not Wakkerstroom; for he was reported correctly to have left Rooikraal on the 12th and to be marching towards Utrecht. On the 15th, therefore, the only column now within reach, that of Pulteney at Wakkerstroom, was despatched in pursuit. Though it is only twenty-eight miles to Utrecht, a week's heavy rain had reduced the road to such a condition that Pulteney, marching with a convoy, was able to cover only fourteen miles in three days. It is to be noticed that Botha, delayed by the same harassing weather, but maintaining, as he was bound to maintain, complete independence of heavy transport, and relying on the led pack-horse for all immediate needs, had come south at an average rate of ten miles a day, including halts. On the 16th, after a day and a half's rest at Frischgewagd, he continued his southward march, and on the 17th his main body of 1,700 men reached

Blood River Poort. Seven miles further to the south-east, at Scheeper's Nek, astride the Dundee-Vryheid road, were 300 of the Vryheid men under Emmett, who was destined to lead the advance into Natal.

Gough and the Vryheid convoy, Sept. 16.

For some days previous to the 17th an empty British convoy, one of the normal service, which had been preparing to return from Vryheid to Dundee, had been detained, first by the bad weather, then by reports that a Boer force, estimated at 500, was menacing the line of march. This was the Vryheid contingent, but, since all eyes were still turning further to the north, its connection with Botha's raid was not suspected. On the 16th, as we have already mentioned, Gough's Mounted Infantry and Stewart's J.M.R. reached De Jager's Drift, where the Dundee–Vryheid road crosses the Buffalo and enters Transvaal territory. While Stewart as yet had no definite orders, Gough was under explicit orders, received from Lyttelton on the 15th, to march out on the 17th to Rooi Kopjes, half-way to Vryheid, to clear the road for the convoy and to bring it into Dundee. Until late in the evening of the 16th, Gough's information of Botha was confined to the vaguest rumours, but at 9 P.M. he received the following telegram from Lyttelton's headquarters at Newcastle:—

From D.A.G., 7.40 p.m., Sept. 16.—"It appears that Botha with a large force is at Bosjes Krans" [this is a farm adjoining Frischgewagd on the north]. "whilst about 400 men are at Gehoutboom and Waterval" [these are farms a little to the south of Frischgewagd]. "Under the circumstances the General is considering, if situation does not materially change before to-morrow, Gough's and Stewart's columns should not move against above concentration and endeavour to strike a blow following morning. General would like to have Stewart's and, if possible, Gough's views of this, and what action they would propose. Pulteney should be at Utrecht or somewhere near. His column would, if the above took place, co-operate west, whilst Garratt may probably be also available, but his whereabouts are at present unknown. Of course Boers may move to-night either to attack Utrecht or possibly endeavour to cross Buffalo somewhere between De Jager's and Stael's Drift. In the event of the latter

happening Stewart and Gough will of course act as situation demands on receipt of information and without further orders."

The telegram reveals the doubt and indecision bred by the absence of any proper touch with the enemy. It is true that the news of Botha was approximately correct for the early morning of the 16th; but in the course of the day Botha had been moving south. The idea of co-operation either by Pulteney or Garratt was a dream.

Action of Blood River Poort, Sept. 17.

Gough, treating the telegram somewhat lightly, inferred from it that there was nothing in front of him which he and Stewart together could not tackle, and accordingly resolved, first, to reconnoitre to the north, and then, should the road appear to be tolerably clear, to carry out his original orders with regard to the Vryheid convoy. Before dawn on the 17th he sent out patrols and Boer spies. At mid-day one of these patrols signalled back from Rooi Kopjes that some Boers were visible at Scheeper's Nek, on the Vryheid road. Concluding that these were merely the same men who for several days past had been reported as investing the road, Gough marched out to Rooi Kopjes and Stewart, with the J.M.R., followed in support. About two o'clock, leaving his regiment under cover behind the kopjes, Gough mounted high ground and saw on the farther side of the Blood River 200 or 300 Boers posted at the point where the Vryheid road climbs over Scheeper's Nek. Attack by daylight would have been useless; for the ground was bare and open. Gough, therefore, sent back a proposal to Stewart that both regiments should lie concealed till dark and then attack. To this Stewart agreed, but a little later the Boers were seen by Gough to ride across to the north and disappear behind a ridge some six miles away. Just beyond this ridge, and masked by it, lay the mouth of Blood River Poort, a long gorge by which the Blood issues from the southern spurs of the Schurweberg. A few minutes later the Boer horses were seen to have been turned out to graze, off-saddled. The men being still out of sight, it occurred to Gough that by making a *détour* he might surprise and overwhelm them before they could regain their horses. Though

the intention was admirable, Gough, unfortunately, had not scouted his ground and was not aware that Louis Botha's main body had just marched down the Poort. Having sent back a message to Stewart, who was a mile and a half behind, asking his support, Gough moved rapidly forward with three companies of M.I., two guns of the 69th Battery and a Colt gun. His fourth company was left to guard the transport. Arrived within a mile of his objective, he found that he could no longer conceal his troops. An expanse of open ground had to be crossed, and he crossed it at a gallop, in line of columns, with the guns in rear. The surprise appeared to be complete, and the M.I. were just engaged at close quarters with a fair prospect of success when out of the Poort, a little to their left, there galloped some 500 Boers in close formation. These crossed the British front, gained open ground, wheeled and charged down upon the flank and rear of Gough's right-hand company. Then they dismounted and pressed forward on foot, rolling up the British line from right to left. Caught widely extended and with no time to rally against the heavy odds opposed to them, the M.I. were in a hopeless situation. It was all over in ten minutes. Six officers and 38 men were killed or wounded and the rest, six officers and 235 men, were taken prisoners. The guns, too, were captured, after a vain attempt to fire case. Stewart, who had loyally assented to Gough's request for support, was too far behind to be of any use and indeed narrowly escaped Gough's fate. Seeing that a catastrophe was imminent, he had galloped his men forward only to find himself on the verge of envelopment by superior forces. Having succeeded with some difficulty in saving Gough's transport, he wisely fell back on De Jager's Drift, thus closing the Dundee road to Botha.

Comment. This was the first occasion on which the Boers of the Eastern Transvaal used the new charging tactics with decisive effect. Gough's charge was one of the rare attempts on the British side to initiate the same sort of tactics.* An impulsive young officer, thirsting to make some daring use of his

* That is, in actions in the open field. As the culminating stage of a night-raid the charge at early dawn was frequently used.

first independent command, he took a risk blindly and came to grief. His error should not be judged harshly. Emphatically, it was on the right side. Moreover, had it been possible to maintain any sort of contact with Botha's raiding force, the conditions which went to produce such carelessness would not have been present.

III

Itala and Prospect

Large reinforcements sent to Natal, latter part of September.

WHEN the news of Gough's reverse reached Lyttelton in the small hours of the 18th, large additional reinforcements were at once ordered to Natal. The Scottish Rifles were despatched from Springs; Dartnell, with the 2nd Imperial Light Horse, was taken from Rundle and sent to Glencoe; Loxton's Horse and other detachments belonging to Rundle were diverted to Ladysmith; Spens brought over the 13th and 14th M.I. and four guns; the Western Transvaal was robbed of a third force, that of Gilbert Hamilton, then at Klerksdorp; and a little later Elliot, now at Harrismith, contributed Bethune's column. After repeated failures, due to the misty weather, communication was at last gained with W. Kitchener in the Ermelo district; and he, Campbell and Colville were ordered into the Natal railway, which they reached on the 22nd and 23rd. Lastly, the Natal Volunteers, nearly 1,500 strong, were mobilised by Colonel Mills at Maritzburg, and orders were even given for the Zulus to be called out to defend their own frontier. A few impis, armed only with assegais and a few old rifles, were actually assembled, and wisely dismissed. Including the columns already present, but without reckoning the normal garrison of Natal, some 16,000 men and forty guns were gathered in the course of the month to deal with a raiding force now about 2,000 strong. With the exception of W. Kitchener, there was no officer with the troops of higher rank than that of colonel. General Clements, therefore, who had not commanded in the field since January, was summoned from Standerton to control a brigade formed of the columns of Stewart, Pulteney and

New commands.

Gilbert Hamilton; and General Bruce Hamilton left his work in the Free State to command the joint forces of Spens and Allenby. The indirect influence of the raid extended still further; for Elliot's division remained at Harrismith in readiness to proceed to Natal; Rundle watched the passes of the Drakensberg, and preparations were hurriedly made for the construction of a block-house line from Wakkerstroom to Piet Retief with a view of closing the door through which Botha had entered the southern angle of the Transvaal.

Lyttelton's difficulties.

While reinforcements poured into Natal, the power to use them effectively was in abeyance. Lyttelton's position was one of much embarrassment. During his absence from South Africa a new army, of whose capacities he had no experience, had been created and trained. At a day's notice he was faced with an emergency for which Natal, under the military system established a year before,* was ill-prepared. There was a large permanent establishment, but it was disseminated over a multitude of small garrisons and engaged almost entirely in passive or semi-passive duties. Hence, at a threat of invasion, masses of troops under leaders strange to the country had to be imported from distant points. And when these troops arrived there was no adequate machinery for their supply and direction. The Natal staff was unaccustomed to the control of large forces; the railway was choked; intelligence was so slow as to be worthless; and transport was so scarce that, when every hour was valuable, columns waited days and sometimes weeks for their outfit; and without the crushing disability of heavy transport none were prepared to act. All this produced inertia, and inertia gave full play to political considerations which, at this stage of the war, should never have been allowed for an instant to influence British strategy. It was not the prospect of some transient damage to Natal which should have dictated that strategy, but the fact that after many weary months of evasion a compact Boer force had challenged attack in the open field.

Misdirected strategy.

Although Botha remained unmolested, his raid had begun to lose momentum. After his success on the 17th he sent

* See chap. ii., pp. 54, 55.

his scouts to feel the Natal frontier, which follows the line of the Buffalo. De Jager's Drift, the nearest approach to Dundee, was already held by Stewart, and Allenby's first squadrons reached it on the 18th. On the same day, further north, Pulteney and a small force under Major King blocked Stael's Drift. South of De Jager's, however, the line of the Buffalo remained unguarded till the 23rd, when Allenby moved to Vant's Drift, fifteen miles from De Jager's, and Spens, on the 24th, moved to Rorke's Drift, seven miles south of Vant's. During the intervening days, given favourable conditions, Botha might possibly have broken across the river. On the 22nd, indeed, he actually advanced as far as Incense Hill, thirteen miles from Vant's Drift, and was engaged there by a small party of volunteers. But the rain which had given him grass, the first condition of mobility, by its long-continued violence now both prejudiced his mobility and blocked his path with floods. His horses had suffered severely from heavy ground and exposure, and on the 22nd the Buffalo was impassable, even at the best drifts. Abandoning the march on Dundee, Botha concentrated at Inkandi Mountain. Thence he decided to make a wide circuit through the Vryheid district, to pierce the centre of Zululand and so to gain Natal by way of the Lower Tugela.

Botha abandons his march against Northern Natal, Sept. 17–22,

On the 24th, with 2,000 men, he was at Babanango Mountain, 35 miles from Inkandi, and close to the frontier of Zululand. Here he was nearly at the southern extremity of the Transvaal; for the Zulu frontier, after trending south as far as Mount Itala, turns east and soon afterwards north, thus forming the boundary of the pocket-shaped Vryheid district. There were no obstacles before him that he could not evade. At the base of the pocket stood two fortified posts, a very small one at Prospect, a larger one at the foot of Mount Itala. Neither was a prize worth fighting for; while beyond lay Melmoth and Eshowe, base-towns of some value, and, beyond them again, Natal. To say that the two posts threatened his communications would be meaningless, for he had none. Yet Botha resolved to attack these posts. We may presume that

and marches for central Zululand, Sept. 23–24.

Map, p. 350

He resolves to attack Itala and Prospect.

he had two motives. In the first place, there is reason to believe that Dannhauser, the local commandant, had told him that the intrenchments were very weak. In the second place, Botha was beginning to realise not only the futility but the peril of prolonging his expedition. If the Buffalo was in flood, the Tugela would be in flood; his horses were in very bad condition, and even if he succeeded in penetrating Natal, the mischief he could do was of no account in proportion to the risk. To create a situation in Natal such as Kritzinger had created in Cape Colony was, of course, impossible. Instead of having boundless regions to roam in and a semi-friendly population to rely on, Botha would be both friendless and confined. He had missed his best chance and was now too late to carry out the larger objects of his raid. On the other hand, he had succeeded, better even than he knew, in creating a strong diversion, and if he could add the capture of these two posts to the success at Blood River Poort, he might well be content with the results of his expedition. In the meantime, every hour increased the perils of the return journey. In marching from Ermelo to Zululand he had deliberately invited envelopment, having penetrated into a *cul-de-sac* with a narrow exit far to the north. His line of retreat was not only unguarded, but was threatened from end to end by British columns.

Botha's danger.

On the evening of the 25th Botha despatched his brother Chris with some 1,400 men to storm Itala post, and Emmett, with 400 men, to make a simultaneous attack on Prospect. He himself, with a small reserve, remained at Babanango.

British position at Itala.

Itala post was defended by 300 men of the Fifth Division M.I.,* (80 of whom had been sent from Prospect on this very evening) and two guns of the 68th Battery; the whole under Major Chapman of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The post had been established only a month, as an off-shoot to Nkandhla, which lies about twelve miles within the Zulu frontier; whereas Itala post stood actually on the frontier,

* Not to be confused with the 5th Battalion M.I. The 5th Division was composed of drafts from the Royal Lancasters, Lancashire Fusiliers, Middlesex Regiment, S. Lancashires, Dorsets, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

astride the border road and close to its junction with the roads to Dundee, Ladysmith and Melmoth. The camp and horse-lines were on level ground at the foot of a long ridge descending in an easterly direction for a mile and a half from the summit of Itala Mountain. It was a singular situation; for without an imprudent dispersion of the small garrison it was possible to hold only a small portion of this commanding ground. But this disadvantage was mitigated by the peculiar formation of the ridge. From the summit downwards, for about a mile, the ground, though rocky and broken, falls by an easy gradient, while the ridge gradually contracts and its sides steepen. At the end of the mile it sharpens to a narrow spur and then drops abruptly to level ground. This narrow spur, directly commanding the camp at a distance of 400 yards, was the key to the whole position. Its flanks are so steep as to be inaccessible and the top had been sangared right across under Chapman's plan of defence. From these sangars there was a clear field of fire for 600 yards up the slope of Itala. That was the limit, for at the end of 600 yards there is a depression in which a considerable force might assemble for an assault. The camp itself was defended by a circle of simple trenches, 4½ feet deep and from 50 to 100 yards apart, so placed as to command 500 yards of level ground to their front. Beyond this distance the ground fell away, except on the eastern side, where, directly abutting on the camp, stood a wood in the shape of a hollow square. Here trenches were thrown out into the central clearing. Of the rest of the perimeter, the south-western section was the most vulnerable. At this point subsidiary ridges of Itala, seamed at their lower ends by a series of deep dongas, afforded many opportunities to an enemy of massing men for an assault. The position on the whole was weak. There was nothing in the nature of a fort or redoubt; there were no emplacements for the artillery; there were no secondary defences, such as wire entanglements. Lastly, if once the sangared spur were stormed, all the trenches below could be raked with an enfilading or plunging rifle-fire. The post, indeed, was never designed to sustain an attack in force.

Chris Botha attacks Itala Peak, Sept. 25.

On the 20th Chapman heard of Gough's reverse and on the following day his patrols got wind of Botha's southward advance. But his first exact intelligence came only on the 25th from some faithful Zulu scouts. These brought the news that he was to be attacked that very night by a strong commando approaching by way of Itala. Zulus, however, generally exaggerated numbers, and Chapman, expecting that the commando would not exceed a few hundred men and wishing to give it a warm and unexpected reception, sent up 80 men, a quarter of the garrison, to the summit of Mount Itala, after dark. This party, under Lieutenant Lefroy of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and Lieutenant Kane, of the South Lancashire Regiment, took up a semi-circular position, facing west. The peak, girdled with boulders which formed natural sangars, made a strong position, but the men holding it were too few. At midnight Chris Botha's first division of 500 men was seen approaching in close formation and was received with a staggering fusillade. The Boers soon recovered, encircled the peak and after half an hour's desperate resistance, rushed and overwhelmed the defending party. Lefroy was badly wounded. Young Kane died shouting "No surrender." Nor was there any general surrender, for many men made their way down the hill, hid among the rocks and fought on.

Itala Post surrounded, night of Sept. 25–26.

The loss of this detachment was a grave one for Chapman, who now had only 220 men to line his sangars and trenches. By 2 A.M. he was hotly engaged on every side. Chris Botha, with 700 men, worked down the main spur of Itala and attacked the sangared neck; Opperman led 400 against the south-eastern defences of the camp. Potgieter and Scholtz, with about the same strength, pressed in from the north, and envelopment was completed by a detached force which held the high ground on the east. All these detachments, with the exception of Chris Botha's, had approached the scene of action by a direct road from Babanango to Fort Prospect. When abreast of Chapman's camp, they had struck off to the west in order to reach their objective, leaving Emmett and a last detachment of 400, whose movements we shall follow later, to proceed and attack Prospect.

From 2 A.M. to 4 A.M. Chapman's men were subjected to a severe ordeal. At every point the Boer strength was overwhelming, and at some points the enemy charged right up to the trenches and sangars, only to recoil before the steady fire of the defence. During this period the two British guns were of considerable service; for there was moonlight bright enough to give them a fair idea of their target while not so bright as to expose the gunners to aimed fire. At 4 A.M. the attack slackened; at 6 it ceased, and Lieutenant Fielding, of the R.A.M.C., went out to succour the wounded on the summit of Itala. But the lull was only temporary. Fielding, on reaching the depression above the sangared neck, found a large force of Boers massed for an attack and was permitted to proceed only on the understanding that he would assist the Boer wounded also.

The first attack, 2–4 A.M.

A few minutes after 6 fire broke out again and continued for thirteen hours. With daylight, Chapman's guns became the target of every rifle and were ordered to cease fire. The Maxim, too, behind the sangars on the spur, was jammed early in the day by a flying sod from the parapet. Of its crew, two privates had already been killed and Lieutenant Trousdale had been fighting it bravely himself. The Boers, who showed great courage and suffered considerable loss, could not be induced to make the last sacrifices necessary for the capture of the post. That the sangared spur was the key to the position they fully realised. A heliogram from Louis Botha at Babanango Peak expressly urged its importance, and directed that it must be taken "at all costs." Chris Botha, unable to persuade his men to cross more than a portion of the fire-swept zone, endeavoured to weary and demoralize the garrison by an accurate and incessant fire upon every portion of the camp and its defences. In this he failed; for the defence at every point was magnificently stubborn. Chapman and his second-in-command, Captain Butler, were both hit, but continued to direct and encourage the defence by every means in their power. None the less, the situation was critical. Ammunition grew scarce, cover was bad and the marksmanship of the Boers was much superior to that of the British troops. As the day

The second attack, 6 A.M.–7 P.M.

wore on, the losses became serious; while exhaustion, hunger and thirst began to tell upon the survivors. Towards evening the outlook was so black that Chapman called the Zulu scouts together and advised them to leave the camp, since, if the post fell, they would meet certain death at the hands of the Boers. The faithful natives refused to go, preferring to share their masters' peril to the very last.

Chris Botha gives it up, 7 P.M.

At 7 P.M., however, Chris Botha gave up the struggle. He dared not waste any more cartridges; he had not gained an inch of ground, and he had lost, in killed and wounded, a hundred of the best fighters in the Transvaal.* Two excellent officers, Scholtz and Potgieter, were dead; Opperman, the best of all, was slightly wounded. Yet, had he known the truth, he might have decided to make one last effort; for Chapman was at the end of his resources. Ammunition was almost exhausted, 81 men had been killed and wounded, and the rest were utterly worn out by continuous work in the trenches for twenty-three hours. He had received no news of relief. Feeling that he must inevitably succumb to another attack, and wishing to save the guns, he resolved to evacuate the post and retire to Nkandhla. At midnight, therefore, leaving only an unarmed party to care for the wounded, he marched quietly off and reached Nkandhla at 4 A.M. on the 27th.

Chapman evacuates the post, night of Sept. 26.

Failure of the attack on Prospect, Sept. 26.

In the meantime, how had Prospect been faring? This post stood on the border road ten miles east of Itala and eleven miles west of Melmoth. It was held by Captain Rowley of the Dorsetshire Regiment with 80 men; 30 belonging to the 5th M.I. and 50, under Lieutenant Mayson Johnson, to the Durham Militia Artillery. Unlike Itala, it was a really strong defensive position. In the centre and on commanding ground, a circular redoubt, impenetrable to rifle-fire, was held by the M.I. and a Maxim, while the Durham Artillery held a stone sangar and some trenches, so disposed as to receive good support from the fire of the redoubt. Outside all was a wire

* This is probably near the truth, notwithstanding that Louis Botha, in letters written from Babanango to the Transvaal Government and Ben Viljoen, gave the losses at Itala as only 18 killed and 40 wounded.

entanglement. Emmett and Grobler, with some 400 Boers, surrounded the post in the small hours of the 26th. Under cover of a thick mist, parties were able to cut the entanglement and to creep within twenty yards of the trenches. At 4.15 A.M. they opened a heavy fire. This was a critical moment for Johnson and his Militiamen. Their spirit was aptly voiced by a sturdy Durham miner, who, in reply to a summons to surrender, shouted "Surrender be damned! I'm a pitman at home, and have been in deeper holes than this before." Mist and darkness were, of course, powerful elements in favour of the attack, but as soon as day dawned and the vapours vanished, Rowley brought the Maxim into play and soon cleared the Boers out of the rocks which surrounded the post. At 9.30 there was another fierce attack. This too was gallantly repelled, and for the rest of the day the Boers confined themselves to a heavy but ineffectual fire. At 6.30 P.M. they drew off with some thirty or forty casualties. Rowley's were only nine, a striking comment on the excellence of the defences. At Prospect, as at Itala, the natives showed touching devotion to their British masters. A party of Zulu police under Sergeant Gumbi, who had been ranging outside the British lines when the attack began, fought their way through the Boers and shared in the defence.

Capture of the Melmoth convoy, Sept. 29.

The costly failure of both attacks on the frontier posts finally decided Botha to relinquish his scheme of invasion. His retreat, however, was leisurely and not unprofitable. Chris Botha was sent off with a reinforcement for Emmett's contingent, and as late as the 29th this contingent snapped up a convoy of thirty wagons which, by some unaccountable carelessness, had been allowed to proceed down the border road from Melmoth with no stronger escort than a few native police.

IV

Botha's Retreat

Bruce Hamilton ordered to relieve Itala, Sept. 26.

THE first news of the attacks on Itala and Prospect reached Lyttelton through Nkandhla on the afternoon of the 26th, while the issue was still uncertain. A plan had just

been made for a double movement from the line of the Buffalo, by Blood River Poort and Nqutu. The latter part of this plan was at once abandoned and Bruce Hamilton was ordered to march at once to Itala with all the available mounted troops from Vant's Drift and Rorke's Drift. Hamilton found that he could not start till the next morning. In the meantime news arrived that Itala and Prospect were still safe and that the Boers had suffered heavily. This might well have led to an expansion of Hamilton's orders; but no change was made.

Hamilton marches to Itala, Sept. 27–28.

Vant's Drift is forty-eight miles from Itala. Hamilton, with 1,600 mounted men from the columns of Spens,* Allenby† and Pulteney, starting without transport at 10 A.M. on the 27th, and marching south-east by Isandhlwana, Fort Louis and Babanango, reached Itala at 9 A.M. on the 28th. This fine march was not well directed. When Hamilton arrived, Chapman had been safe at Nkandhla for seventeen hours, while the main Boer force had been marching north for twenty-four hours, so that Hamilton, in the latter stages of his march, had been moving parallel to it and in the opposite direction. He knew indeed at Fort Louis that a Boer force was going north. Had he at that point or even at Babanango struck off to the east, he would have had a good chance of intercepting Botha's shaken troops in the first stage of their difficult retreat to the north. Any such action, however, presupposed conditions which did not exist. For ten days Botha had been lost to view, and, baffled as he was, he still held the initiative. British efforts had been devoted to the passive defence of the frontier. Hence, when the raid spent itself, neither Lyttelton at headquarters nor Hamilton on the spot had any data for reading their enemy's mind. It was the menace to British territory, not the opportunity for crushing reprisals, which now and for several days longer continued to influence the British strategy. Hamilton reported that Botha had

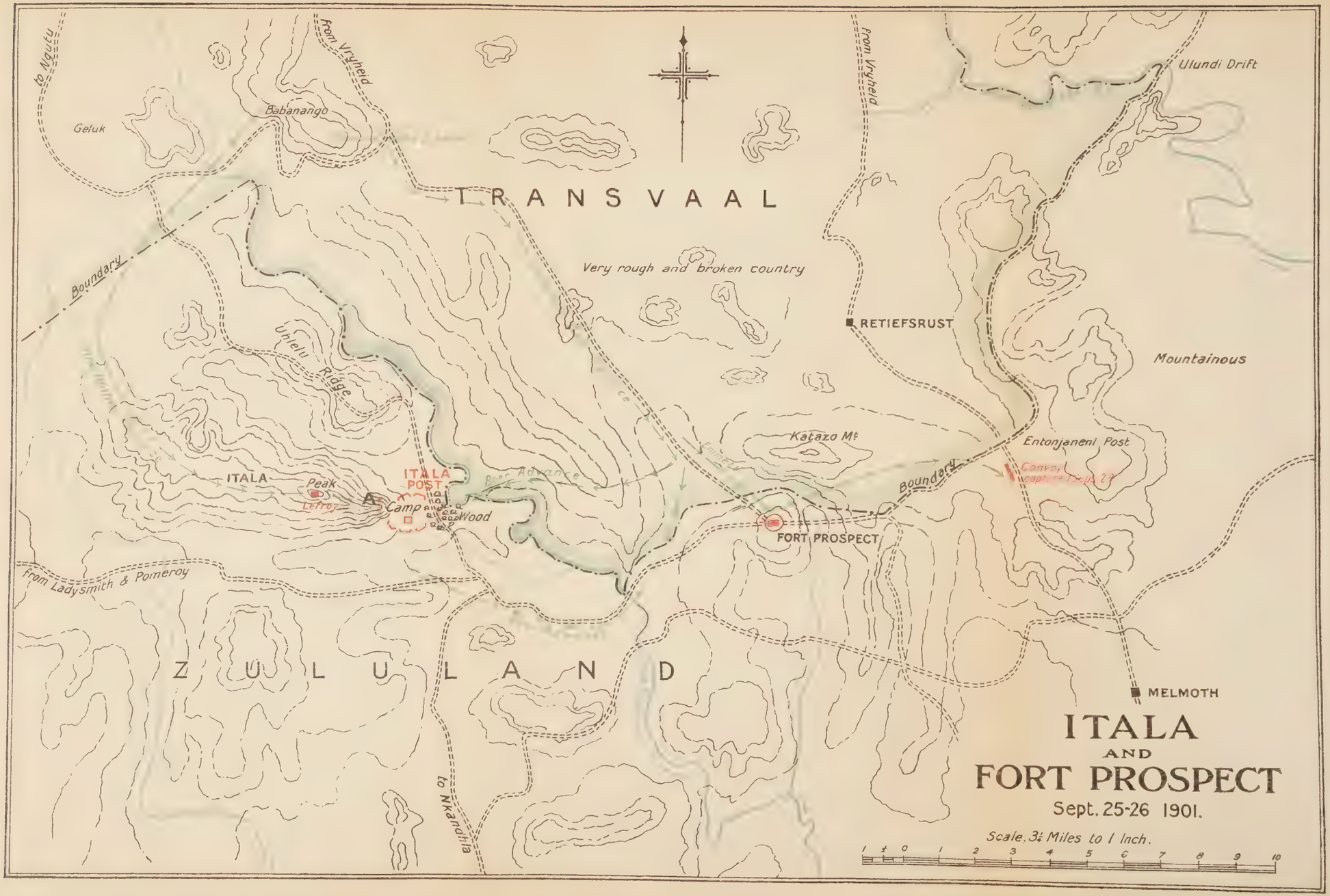
* Spens's Column:—13th and 14th M.I.; two cos. Cameron Highlanders; "J" Battery, four guns; 74th Battery, two guns; one pom-pom.

† Allenby's Column:—Carabiniers, 540; Scots Greys, 542; "O" Battery, four guns; one pom-pom.

DIRECTIONS

A. Sangared spur, Key to British position

The defences of Itala are only roughly indicated. They are not to scale.



gone north; but the capture of the Melmoth convoy on the 29th introduced a fresh element of uncertainty; so much so that steps were taken to strengthen this part of the Zulu border by the despatch of Bethune's column to Eshowe. Dartnell was already on his way to the Zulu capital, and Mills, who had mobilised the Natal Volunteers * with admirable dispatch, was holding the principal drifts on the Lower Tugela. Hamilton, meanwhile, was ordered not to "hustle" the Boers, but to remain on the frontier until other columns could be brought up and a combined movement made. Even the captured convoy was permitted to follow Botha without molestation.

Reinforcements for Zululand.

So the precious hours slipped away. On October 1, however, when no vestige of doubt remained but that Botha was retreating north, a plan was concerted to entrap him. Seven columns were employed, marshalled in three divisions. W. Kitchener, with Garratt and Campbell,† was to block retreat on the north by occupying the passes in the Hlobane —Pondwana mountains, which stretch eastward from Vryheid and can be crossed by wagons only at two points sixteen miles apart, Vaalkranz Nek on the west and Toovernaar's Rust on the east. Between Vryheid and the Natal border the road was to be watched by Stewart. Bruce Hamilton, with Spens and Allenby, was to sweep up from the southward towards this barrier, and Clements, with Gilbert Hamilton and Pulteney, was to co-operate from the west, marching by Vant's Drift, Nqutu and Nondweni. The plan, good in outline, needed swiftness of execution. Botha already had three days' start. It was certain that he had not marched from Ermelo to Itala at the rate of oxen and that he was not likely to do so on his return. Yet the columns were timed to march at the pace of their ox-transport. Kitchener, who was already at Vryheid, had only a short

British plan to entrap Botha, Oct. 1.

* Natal Carbineers, Natal Mounted Rifles, Border Mounted Rifles, Umvoti Mounted Rifles, Composite Bn. of Infantry, two guns.

† Walter Kitchener's Column:—19th Hussars; 5th and 6th West Australians; 2nd Bn. Royal Irish F.; 81st Battery, four guns; one pom-pom (S Section).

W. P. Campbell's Column:—18th Hussars; 1st Bn. Leicester Regt.; 83rd Battery, four guns; two pom-poms (J and S Sections).

distance to go, but Hamilton was to reach the line of Inhlazatie Mountain, twenty-five miles south of the Pondwana range, only on the 5th, and Clements was to concentrate at Nqutu on the same day.

Botha's retreat to the north, Sept. 28–Oct. 2.

Botha was near Inhlazatie Mountain as early as September 29. On October 1 he moved his main body to Intabankulu and on the 2nd, before either Clements or Hamilton had started, he had reached the barrier and sent 500 men to force Vaalkranz Nek. Here he was just too late; for W. Kitchener, marching from Vryheid on that day, was able just in time to occupy the nek with the 18th Hussars, while Garratt held the flanking heights. The Boers fell back unpursued and Botha concentrated his force in the kloofs at Boschhoek, close to the southern brow of the mountain range, with the Melmoth convoy and other locally collected wagons parked at Dageraad, a little further to the east. Here Botha was about midway between the two passes of Vaalkranz Nek and Toovernaar's Rust. His force had shrunk considerably. The Vryheid commando had been left behind and many of the Utrecht and Wakkerstroom men were now riding away in small parties to regain their own districts. One group of 300 crossed the mountains on the 3rd and had a brush with a party of Garratt's men at Geluk. Others were hovering round Leeuwnek, where an important road from Southern Zululand to Vryheid skirts the Inyate range. These suggested an attempt on Botha's part to break west, instead of north; to pass, that is, to the west of Vryheid, as he had passed on his outward journey.

He concentrates at Boschhoek, Oct. 2.

W. Kitchener at Uitzicht, Oct. 2.

On the 2nd, after the affair at Vaalkranz Nek, W. Kitchener had left a detachment to hold that pass and had encamped with the bulk of his force at Uitzicht, about seven miles north by east of Pondwana Mountain. From here he reported to Lyttelton that he could not, without undue dispersion, carry out his orders to occupy Toovernaar's Rust. If the reason given was scarcely sufficient, there was much to be said for this refusal to block the eastern pass. W. Kitchener realised what Lyttelton did not realise, that the pass was important only on the assumption that Botha would cling to his transport. The wagon-road which crosses it is one which

Strategical situation.

runs due north from Southern Zululand by Melmoth and Retief's Rust. At Toovernaar's Rust, however, it is deflected to the west and threads the centre of the mountain range by a gorge flanked on both sides by towering heights, and known as the Geluk gorge. Ultimately the road runs to Vryheid, but at Uitzicht Kitchener stood astride of it and not until four miles west of Uitzicht was there a branch road to the north. This branch, which is, in fact, a prolongation of the road over Vaalkranz Nek, leads by a circuitous route to Pivaan Bridge, the only point where in seasons of heavy flood the Pivaan River could be crossed with any certainty by wagons. In other words, to a force marching north with heavy transport and aiming at regaining Ermelo without a laborious eastern detour by way of Swaziland, whither no good roads existed, the routes by Vaalkranz Nek and Toovernaar's Rust were one, and at Uitzicht Kitchener commanded both. But Botha took the right view of wagons. When they threatened to hamper the escape of his main body he parted from them without hesitation and even made them serve his ends; for he calculated that if he succeeded in breaking through he would distract attention from his transport, which might escape by slower methods. The decision taken, his problem was greatly simplified; for, short of Uitzicht, there are bridle paths over the mountains, both into and out of the Geluk gorge, which with skilled local knowledge could be negotiated with safety.

W. Kitchener's plans, Oct. 2–5.

W. Kitchener, who was aware that these paths existed and that Botha might use them, thought that he could check even this move. He satisfied himself that Botha, however he rode from Boschhoek, must ultimately debouch from the hills at the farm Yorkshire, five miles north of Uitzicht, and he calculated that it would be time enough to march for this "bolt-hole" when he heard that Botha had left Boschhoek. The calculation was precarious. Yorkshire presented the last possible chance of intercepting Botha, and without close and constant observation of his enemy, Kitchener, even at Yorkshire, was in danger of being too late. On the 3rd and 4th he did indeed send reconnaissances along the Geluk defile, but on every night and during the whole of the 5th,

Botha was unwatched save by native spies; nor were any arrangements made for checking him in the defile. Allowance must be made for Kitchener's difficulties. He was still haunted by the idea that Botha might execute a *volte-face* and break away behind him by way of Leeuwnek; and, above all, he still believed that he was part of a combination in which Clements and Bruce Hamilton were effective factors. Otherwise he would have looked with more favour on another obvious alternative, that of attacking Botha at Boschhoek. He had 3,400 men, of whom 2,000 were mounted; Botha about 1,400. Compelled to rest his weakened horses before their passage of the mountains and their long ride to the north, Botha rested at Boschhoek for three days. On tactical grounds Kitchener decided against the attack. The position, he decided, could be attacked only from the west and south; he had not enough troops to block outlets, and Botha, should he decline an action, would be able to dart away by the north. On the other hand, by sitting at Uitzicht, he blocked, or thought he blocked, the north, while Clements and Hamilton were supposed to be coming up from the west and south respectively.

Clements and Bruce Hamilton, Oct. 2–5.

In point of fact, neither Clements nor Hamilton ever became, or, without a radical change of methods, ever could have become, effective factors in the combination. Hamilton, on the evening of the 5th, punctual to his original orders, was only at Inhlazatie. An attempt was made to bring up Clements sooner than the original plan had contemplated. On the night of the 4th he was at Nondweni, and on the 5th, had he not misunderstood his far from explicit orders, he might have been somewhat nearer the scene of action; but marching, as he was designed to march, at the rate of ox-transport, he, like Hamilton, could not have been in time.*

* The evidence puts this beyond question. Hence we refrain from a detailed account—an account which, in order to be complete, would run to excessive length—of the delays and misunderstandings which attended Clements's movements. It must suffice to say that instead of marching towards Boschhoek or Vaalkranz, he began a westerly detour by the main road to Vryheid, thinking that by that means he could best help Kitchener. He was recalled on the 6th, but, his transport having already preceded him, he was reduced to immobility for three days.

If the 27th and 28th of February had been the critical hour of de Wet's fortunes,* the 3rd, 4th and 5th of October were the critical hour of Botha's fortunes. The curtain of mystery behind which he had moved for three weeks had been rent apart on the 2nd when he was marked down at Boschhoek. From that moment the plan framed to entrap him was obsolete. We cannot but regret that no effort was made, even at the eleventh hour, to vitalise the lifeless ritual of the drive—for that, in effect, was the method employed—by directing upon Boschhoek every mounted man of the three brigades, unfettered by oxen, at whatever cost of fatigue and hunger, for this supreme opportunity. All these mounted men were within forty-five miles of Boschhoek. Kitchener was ten miles from the same point. It would be unjust to the troops to say that they were incapable of such an effort. Many had been accustomed to ride much longer distances within the daylight hours. Five days earlier, for a much less important object, Bruce Hamilton had ridden forty-eight miles in twenty-three hours, carrying three days' rations. It is true that the country was bad, the weather bad, and the maps imperfect, but these were all additional reasons for discarding every encumbrance. To march as Botha marched was the only chance, good or bad, of grappling with him. Unfortunately the spirit of the drive, the reliance, that is, on a centralised mechanical process as a complete substitute for swift and resourceful initiative, had become so inveterate as to defy the most patent facts and necessities.

A great opportunity missed.

On the night of the 5th, having left 200 men under his brother to guard and, if possible, to save the convoy, Botha, with his main body, dropped down from his eyrie at Boschhoek into the Geluk defile, and at dawn on the 6th, after a ride of fifteen miles, was strongly posted between the farms of Yorkshire and Goedhoek and astride the road to Pivaan Bridge. Hard by was his own home, the farm Waterval. Kitchener, in the course of the night, heard of the movement from Kaffir spies and at 3 A.M. marched out with his whole force. Tired as they were, the Boers had the

Botha crosses the mountains, Oct. 5, night.

* See pages 150–152.

advantage of having already seized a very strong position. They fought a skilful rearg-uard action for seven hours, during which the losses on both sides were slight, and then withdrew to the north. Garratt, by a wide turning movement, was able to block any further advance on the road to Pivaan Bridge; but Botha, having no transport, did not need the road, and forded the Pivaan, near its junction with the Manzaan Spruit, on the same night.

Action of Yorkshire, Oct. 6.

Botha escapes to the north, Oct. 6

and passes Piet Retief, Oct. 7–11.

Here, for practical purposes, he passed out of British ken. Kitchener did follow, but by the circuitous road over Pivaan Bridge, a road so water-logged that he covered only twenty-seven miles in five days. There was another faint chance of intercepting Botha. Between Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief a blockhouse line, to whose inception we alluded some pages back, was in course of construction by Colonel Bullock and two battalions of infantry. Colville's mobile column was covering the work, and Plumer * was being transported by train from the far south of the Free State to reinforce Colville. The idea that this blockhouse line, even had it been complete, would have stopped Botha for a moment, was visionary. In point of fact, it was not complete and the incomplete section, the strip of comparatively level ground, twelve miles in width, between Annyspruit and Piet Retief, was at this juncture the most important section. It was the door through which Botha had come and through which he now returned. The one mobile column which was in a position to oppose him, Colville's, was chained to the secondary objective of guarding the blockhouse line. Plumer arrived at Wakkerstroom only on the 12th. Colville was able to scour the gap between Annyspruit and Piet Retief on the 11th. By that time Botha, after shedding batches of local men, had passed through with the original nucleus of his force, the high veld commandos, and thus issued from that dangerous *cul-de-sac* a hundred miles in length and, for strategical purposes, at its broadest part no more than thirty miles in width, into which a month before he had ventured himself.

* Plumer's Column:—5th Queensland I.B., 400; 6th New Zealand M I., 400; 18th Batt. R.F.A., four guns.

Conclusion of the operations, last half October.

Of the convoy he had left at Dageraad before his passage of the mountains, little ever found its way to the north. Chris Botha took a portion and managed to get it through the forests and swamps which lie to the east of the mountains and even as far north as Swaziland, which he entered on the 13th by crossing the Assegai at Mahamba Drift. Here Colville heard of the trek, followed the wagons and captured them, while the escort fled. The rest of the Dageraad laager floundered about for some days in the neighbourhood of Toovernaar's Rust. Part fell into Bruce Hamilton's hands and the rest escaped.* It was not till the 14th that Lyttelton knew definitely that Botha's main body had passed Piet Retief. In the meantime, touch had been lost so completely that some local men who had left Botha and betaken themselves to the Pongola Bosch and the southern gorges of the Slangapiesberg, were suspected, on native rumours, to be the main Boer force. Eight columns, representing all the mobile troops engaged in the previous operations, were assembled round this region. As it turned out there was little to do save clearing work, but even this was no easy matter. The Pongola Bosch is a blind jungle; the Slangapies a riot of precipitous peaks and tortuous ravines. The season was prolific in rain and baffling mists, while the troops were tired and the horses terribly weakened by exposure. French's operations in March and April and Plumer's in June had left this region practically untouched; and even now, hard and cheerfully as the columns worked, no final clearance could be made. Some 30 Boers were killed or wounded and 100 captured, together with much stock and many wagons. Among the spoil were the two field-guns captured by Botha at Blood River Poort and abandoned near Piet Retief, where they were discovered by Campbell. In the

* On the 6th, when Botha's escape was known, Bruce Hamilton, who was at Inhlazatie, was ordered to strike at the convoy. The exigencies of supply, the delay caused by a countermanding order, together with heavy rains and mists, made his progress very slow and the hardships suffered by his men and horses very severe. He reached Toovernaar's Rust, where Allenby destroyed 31 wagons and carts, on the 11th, and Vryheid, *vid* Uitzicht, on the 14th.

last week of October most of the columns were withdrawn; Garratt, Pulteney and Plumer, whose Australasians had done some of the best work, being the last to leave. Bethune and Dartnell returned from Southern Zululand to the Free State; Mills's Volunteers were disbanded, and the Natal frontier was once more at rest.

Comment on the British operations.

Apart from the stirring memories which the gallant defence of Itala and Prospect will always arouse, the British operations, after generous indulgence for the great difficulties encountered, leave a sense of keen disappointment. In every particular they compare most unfavourably with those of the great de Wet hunt seven months earlier. The troops, although from no fault of their own they were not equal to the best Boer troops, were certainly capable of better work than this. Botha was opposed by antiquated methods. He rode, and for all intents and purposes the British walked. He broke his teeth on obstacles which existed before his raid was dreamt of, but of all the forces assembled on his front, flank and rear, none, save in Gough's unlucky plunge into an ambuscade and Kitchener's sterile rear-guard action, were able to attack him or even to gain contact with him. It would be profitless to look for individual errors or deficiencies. It was apparent at every step that the training of the army as a whole had not fitted it to cope with such an emergency. Yet this was precisely the emergency for which it should have been trained. The army had been permeated with the idea that the war was a war of attrition, and when it suddenly assumed a wholly different aspect all the enterprise and mobility learnt in pursuing that end were thrown away. Kitchener's instructions of August 31, excellent in intention, narrow in scope, had been taken only too literally.* Thus, after two years of war, Botha was able to assert and, in spite of damaging checks, to maintain to the end of the operations a moral ascendency.

The results of the raid.

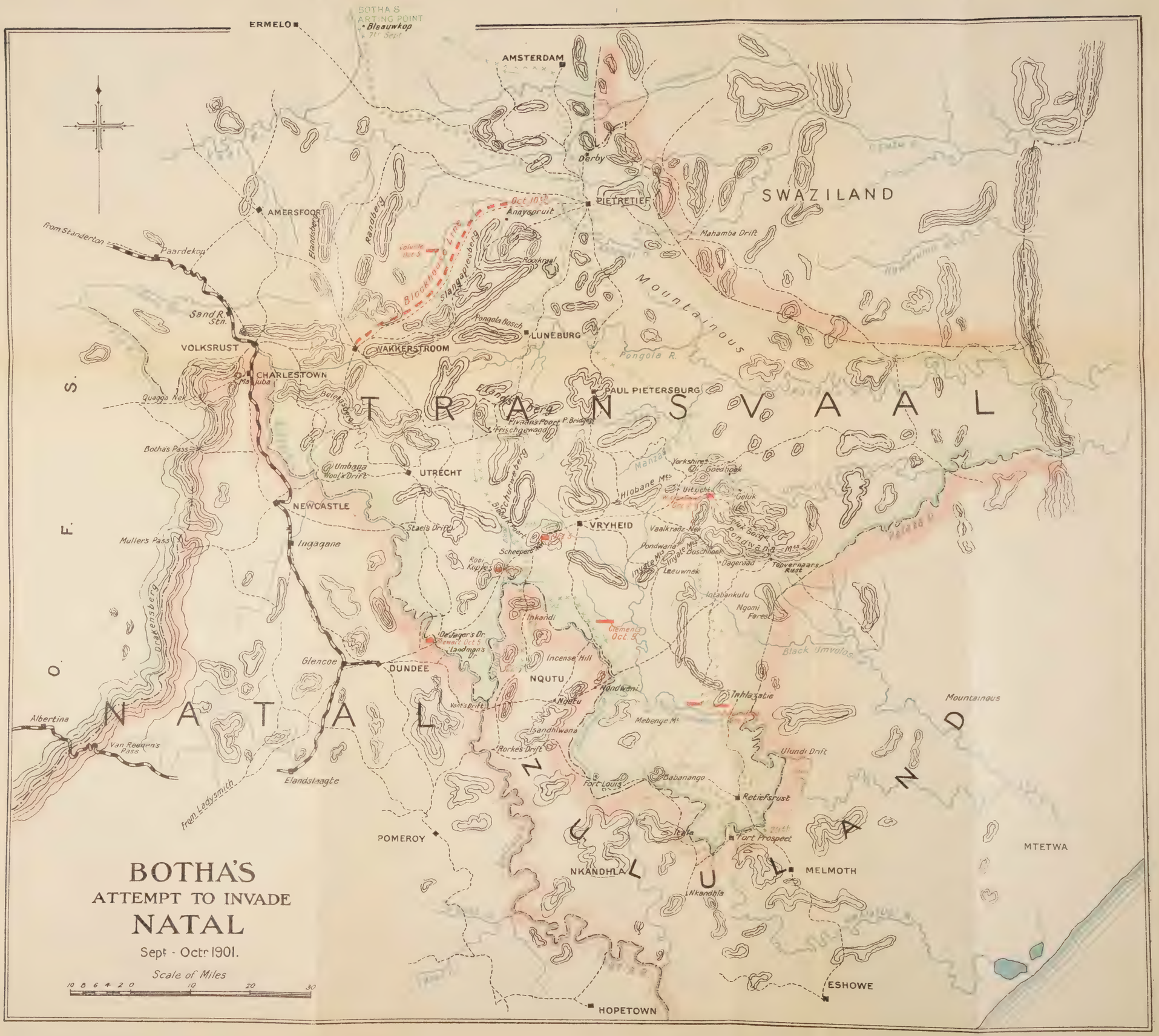
This, perhaps, was his chief gain from an expedition which after a loss of many valuable men had failed in its ostensible object. As a diversion, however, it had succeeded, though not to the extent that Botha might have anticipated.

* See Chapter xi., p. 322.

DIRECTIONS

- British
- Main Boer Force
- Emmett & Grobler

The map shows the whole course of Botha's March, & the British positions on the evening of Oct. 5. (It has been found impossible without undue confusion, to indicate all British movements)



In attracting to the eastern frontier of Natal a large part of the mobile forces in South Africa he had given de Wet an opportunity of taking some determined action against the western frontier. One of these rapid concentrations, of which the Free State leader had once been a master, directed upon this point might have placed the British in a situation of serious embarrassment. But de Wet, beyond collecting a few hundred men at Vrede in the latter part of September and making a faint demonstration against Botha's Pass, did nothing to help Botha or embarrass Lyttelton. No doubt this inaction was partly due to the efforts of Rundle and Elliot during the past winter and to their vigilant patrolling of the Drakensberg during the course of the operations.

In other parts of the theatre of war the raid had its effect, or at any rate its counterpart, in the general spring revival. In the Western Transvaal, Garratt, Allenby and Gilbert Hamilton having been withdrawn for the succour of Natal, De la Rey concentrated twice against isolated columns. In the southern Free State small forces were overwhelmed by Brand and Kritzinger, and Smuts made a similar stroke in Cape Colony. These events will be dealt with later. But the most signal results of Botha's diversion were achieved by himself in the very region in which that diversion had had its birth, the high veld of the Eastern Transvaal, whither we now propose to follow him.

CHAPTER XIII

BAKENLAAGTE, MOEDWIL, AND OTHER INCIDENTS OF THE BOER SPRING REVIVAL

(September–October, 1901)

I

Bakenlaagte

Botha rides to meet his Government, Oct. 8–11.

LOUIS BOTHA, riding ahead of his commandos, reached Piet Retief on October 8. From here he wrote to his Government, giving a history of his expedition, and also to Commandant Grobler of Bethal, asking that officer "to send him news of what to do." On the 11th, travelling north, he reached the farm Athole, near Amsterdam, where he found the Government laager, and here he remained for six days. Meanwhile Chris Botha, Opperman (who had recovered from the wound received at Itala), Britz, Henderson and other leaders, rallied and rested the high veld commandos in the district south and east of Ermelo.

He receives bad reports.

From the news he received of affairs in the Eastern Transvaal Botha realised that he was badly needed. During his absence in the south, Ben Viljoen, whom he had urged "to act strongly," had done nothing at all. On the other hand, the high veld was ringing with the exploits of a single British column, that of Colonel Benson.

Benson's night raids, Sept. 10–Oct. 1.

At the close of Chapter XI. we described a series of dashing night raids conducted by Benson in conjunction with his brilliant intelligence officer, Colonel Woolls-Sampson. It was just at the moment when Botha was concentrating for the invasion of Natal that Benson had transferred his column to the Carolina district, and Botha's back was

scarcely turned when the laagers of that district, weakened as they were by the withdrawal of many of their best men for the southern raid, suffered a series of stinging blows. On September 10, 15, and 16 long nocturnal rides led to substantial captures, and the climax came on September 18, when after a forty-mile ride the British troopers galloped into a laager at Middeldrift, on the Umpilusi River, and took 54 prisoners, 240 horses and all the wagons and cattle. After a rest at Carolina, Benson turned westward and proceeded to deal with the Bethal district. On his way he snapped up two small laagers (September 28 and October 1) at Momsen's Store and Driefontein; but the fame of his doings had preceded him, so that around Bethal he was confronted with a task of increasing difficulty.

Previous inactivity of commandos west of Ermelo, Sept.

Hitherto the commandos west of Ermelo had shown no disposition to fight during Botha's absence in Natal. Bethal and South Middelburg had sent their best men and horses to the south. Pretoria and Heidelberg, according to a field-state sent to Botha by Ben Viljoen on September 13, could muster only 440 properly mounted burghers between the Natal and Delagoa railways. During September Colonel Pilkington, of the S.A.C., had been permitted, with scarcely any opposition, to enlarge the protected area east of Pretoria by pushing forward the line of Constabulary posts, hitherto connecting the Natal and Delagoa Railways between the points Eerstefabrieken and Heidelberg, to the line Wilge River Station—Greylingstad. The work had been well covered by three mobile columns under Colonels Hacket Thompson, Bewicke-Copley and Sir Henry Rawlinson *; and so smoothly did it progress that in October Kitchener was able to withdraw Thompson (soon afterwards succeeded by Colonel Fortescue) and Rawlinson. Fortescue was sent on an expedition into the bush veld north of the Delagoa Railway, where, in conjunction with Colonel Ingouville-Williams and 600 Australians, who were railed up from Klerksdorp for the purpose, he succeeded in inflicting considerable loss on two of the North Pretoria bands under Piet

Constabulary posts pushed forward, Sept.

* Rawlinson was transferred from the Zastron district of the Free State, where he had been operating against Kritzinger. See pp. 318–319.

Uys and Thys Pretorius. Rawlinson was sent to operate on the upper Vaal.

Benson alarms the Bethal district, Oct. 1–12.

Wholly indifferent to the progress of the great ring fence, the Boers were roused from their apathy by the coming of Benson. The word went round the Bethal district that the laagers were to be kept constantly moving; that no camp was to be pitched on the same place for two successive nights, and that every morning horses were to be saddled up at 3 A.M. These precautions were so effective that Benson prowled over the district for a week without making any captures worth recording. On October 12 he came into the line at Middelburg to refit his column and exchange certain units, and on the 20th, not by any means disheartened, he marched south again toward the same hunting-ground.

Benson refits at Middelburg, Oct. 12–20, and marches out, Oct. 20.

Grobler asks help of Botha, mid-October.

But during that week spent at Middelburg his foes had been taking counsel. Grobler of Bethal, in answer to Botha's letter of inquiry from Piet Retief, had indicated Benson's column as the proper object of attack, and the hint fell on willing ears. Benson's name was anathema in every quarter of the high veld, but it was among those burghers of Ermelo and Carolina, who had accompanied Botha to Natal, that it aroused the greatest resentment. The former had returned to find Ermelo a heap of ruins and wrongly attributed the destruction to Benson. The latter were smarting under the story of his raids in their native district. Both commandos were hot for revenge and in spite of the fatigue of their long journey to Zululand were ready, should an opportunity arise, to obey the summons for a fresh concentration. Meanwhile rumours of danger from the south and west reached the Government laager. Taking alarm, Botha, accompanied by the Government, left Athole on the 17th; on the 18th they were at Bankkop; and from the 19th to the 24th Botha slept at the farm Schimmelhoek, twenty miles east of Ermelo. The Government occupied a neighbouring farm called Mooiplaats. At Schimmelhoek Botha was suddenly attacked under the following circumstances.

Botha and the Government leave Athole, Oct. 17–24.

The raid on Botha at Schimmelhoek, Oct. 24–25.

On the 16th, news of his presence at Athole had been communicated to the British intelligence. The fog of uncertainty which had shrouded his movements for ten days

having thus cleared for a moment, Kitchener had looked round for columns with which to attack him. Nothing was to be expected from the south, where the forces originally gathered to thwart the raid upon Natal were still, with exhausted horses and beasts, labouring to clear the Slangapiesberg; but two strong mounted columns, under Colonels Rimington and Sir H. Rawlinson,* were operating on the Vaal within easy reach of the Natal Railway. Both were summoned to Standerton, refitted and despatched against Botha. Starting, on the 19th, with a joint strength of 2,000 mounted men and eight guns, and marching by Paardekop, Amersfoort and the Mabusa Spruit, the two columns were at Klipfontein on the 24th. Here Rimington seized a Boer carrying a despatch which proved that Botha was quartered at Schimmelhoek, and a plan was accordingly concerted to surround and raid the farm. Rimington, who had been practising night-raids in the Free State for the last six weeks with considerable success, was to march at midnight to a position overlooking the farm whence he could block all avenues of escape to the south and east; Rawlinson, at daylight on the 25th, was to demonstrate on the west so as to drive Botha into the arms of Rimington. Unfortunately, Botha was to some extent on his guard. A cordon of vigilant scouts stood round the farm and a body of 300 men under Chris Botha, who, as it appears from another captured despatch, had warned his brother and the Government in good time, was laagered directly in Rawlinson's path. This body represented about half of the force now under Botha's hand; Opperman, with the remainder, being a few miles away to the south-east. Guided by the Boer captive, Rimington gained the hill above the farm at 7 A.M. on the 25th, only to see the General, his young son and a few followers galloping away to the north. Their escape was narrow. Botha left behind his hat and a bag of correspondence, and with this

Botha escapes, Oct. 25.

* Rawlinson's column:—2nd M.I., 500; 8th M.I., 500; Roberts's Horse, 50; Kitchener's Horse, 86; 8th Battery, R.F.A., four guns; two pom-poms (B and Z Sections). Rimington's column:—6th Dragoons, 435; 3rd N.S.W. M.R., 545; 2 guns "J." battery; 2 guns 74th Battery; 1 pom-pom.

spoil and four prisoners Rimington had to be content. Chris Botha and his small force, delaying Rawlinson with a series of audacious rear-guard actions on the ridges of Onverwacht and Blaauwkop, and covering the flight of the Commandant-General, also escaped in a northerly direction. Had a keener and clearer purpose actuated the operations of the guerilla war, Botha and this covering force would have been pursued *à outrance*, however faint the prospects of a stern chase and however far the chase led from the railway. As it was, the two columns left the scent and turned back towards Opperman. In spite of much energetic night marching and much ingenious stratagem, Opperman slipped to the north on the 27th and joined Botha, while a local band, which suddenly made its appearance, decoyed the two columns still further to the south-east and away from the scene of decisive action. Hunted into the Randberg it finally disappeared, and on October 30 Rimington and Rawlinson marched into the railway at Standerton and Volksrust respectively. Botha's opportunity had come. Save for Benson's isolated column, which had left Middelburg on the 20th and was now in the neighbourhood of Bethal, the high veld was deserted.

Rimington and Rawlinson are drawn away to the south, Oct. 25–30.

Benson's force when he left Middelburg, Oct. 20.

Benson's force had been reconstituted and was now as follows: 3rd M.I., 350, under Major Anley of the Essex Regiment; 25th M.I., 350, under Captain Eustace of the 60th Rifles; 2nd Scottish Horse, 250, under Major F. D. Murray of the Black Watch; 2nd Buffs, 650, under Major Dauglish —in all 1,400 rifles, about two-thirds of whom were mounted, together with four guns of Guinness's 84th Battery and two pom-poms. Provisioned for a long stay in the high veld, the column was accompanied by no less than 350 wheeled vehicles, of which 120 were ox-wagons. A similar burden, if not so heavy, Benson had always had; but, dangerous encumbrance as it was, he had not allowed it to fetter his freedom of action. It was, in fact, a movable supply depôt, garrisoned by infantry, who thus fulfilled their true function in the guerilla war, while the mounted troops ranged far abroad.

At the outset all went well; for on the 22nd 37 prisoners were taken at Klippoortje, 16 miles south of Brugspruit,

Lieut.-Colonel A. Woolls-Sampson, C.B.

Colonel G. E. Benson, R.A.

From a Drawing by C. W. Walton.

after a long nocturnal ride. But near Bethal itself even Sampson found no scope for his ingenuity. Instead of nervous laagers, ripe for surprise and capture, the two officers met with bands as active as their own, refusing action which was repeatedly offered, yet evidently bent on mischief. Grobler of Bethal had called to arms against the common enemy men from Middelburg under Piet Trichard and Piet Erasmus, men from Pretoria under Gert and Joachim Prinsloo, and, with his own Bethal contingent, a few Heidelbergers, and a small number of the Staats Artillerie under Wolmarans, was capable of rapidly mustering about 700 men. On the 26th there was a sharp action at Rietkuil on the Steenkool Spruit, and on three succeeding days there were many slight collisions. Meanwhile, in default of night raids, Benson occupied himself with ordinary clearing work. On the evening of the 29th, having gathered some 50 prisoners and a great many non-combatants, he encamped at Zwakfontein, 15 miles west by north of Bethal.

His operations and difficulties, Oct. 20–29.

Cut off from the outside world, he was nevertheless perfectly aware of the danger he was running. He knew that Grobler's force was swelling. He knew, too, that Botha had returned from Natal and might be expected to send aid to Grobler. Hitherto these circumstances had not affected him. Now, however, supplies were running low and since opportunities were lacking for his favourite tactics, Benson resolved to return to the railway at Brugspruit, distant 35 miles. Early on the 30th, therefore, in misty and threatening weather, he marched north from Zwakfontein. The ox-convoy, protected by two companies of the 25th M.I. (a battalion drawn from the 60th Rifles), one and a half companies of the Buffs and two guns, started at 4.30 A.M., and were followed an hour later by the lighter transport and the rest of the column, disposed as follows: the flank-guards and advance-guard were furnished by the 25th M.I. and 3rd M.I.; with the transport were three and a half companies of Buffs, the Scottish Horse and two guns; while the rear-guard, with whose doings we are most particularly concerned, consisted of 180 men of the 3rd M.I. (composed of detachments from the King's Own Yorkshire L.I., Dublin Fusiliers

He begins his retreat to the railway, Oct. 30.

Disposition of the column.

and Loyal North Lancashires), a weak company of Buffs and one pom-pom, the whole under Major Gore Anley of the Essex Regiment. The country to be traversed was an expanse of bare undulating downs, resembling an ocean swell. If, for lack of a better word, we have to call the undulations "ridges," the word is not intended to imply any sharpness of definition. So gentle was the contour of each grassy billow that only a quick and practised eye could locate the actual summit or gauge the depth of the trough.

Progress of the march, 4.30 A.M.–1 P.M.

As soon as the column started, Boers in considerable force began to press the rear-guard, while others, but not with the same determination, harassed the flanks and front. Recent rain having made the road very heavy, the convoys, after two hours' marching, had begun to straggle and the distance between the rear-guard and other troops to widen out considerably. At 9 A.M. a difficult drift over a tributary of the Steenkool Spruit caused a delay of several hours, during which the head of the ox-convoy halted, so that the two convoys, straggling as they were, became one. At this time Anley's rear-guard was disposed as follows: the North Lancashire Company of the 3rd M.I. formed a rear screen; the Dublin Fusiliers Company supplied two small flanking detachments thrown out very wide; while the pom-pom and a supporting company of Yorkshire Light Infantry kept about a thousand yards ahead of the rear screen, whose advance they covered with shell and rifle-fire. The remaining unit of the rear-guard, namely, the company of Buffs, only fifty strong, under Lieutenant Greatwood, had just been ordered to march with the tail of the convoy. Thus far the weather had been merely threatening. Now rain began to fall in cold, misty showers, driven by a high southerly wind. Since the column was travelling north, this naturally made the work of the rear-guard increasingly difficult and at the same time emboldened the Boers to redouble their efforts in that quarter. Anley, however, handled his men with skill. The 3rd M.I., retiring steadily in successive rushes, well covered by the pom-pom, which worked one ridge behind them, were successful to a

considerable extent in keeping down the hostile fire; though, unfortunately, this was done with far too lavish an expenditure both of shell and rifle ammunition. Till 1 o'clock all went well. Then two wagons of the convoy became completely bogged, and the rear-guard halted to wait for their extrication. Meanwhile the rest of the transport moved on to the farmhouse Nooitgedacht, almost four miles north of Anley's rear-screen. Close to this point the boundaries of three farm-lands—Nooitgedacht, Schaapkraal and Bakenlaagte—meet, and here a site was selected for the evening's camp. Though the coming action has always been called after Bakenlaagte, it was actually fought within the borders of Nooitgedacht.

Map, p. 374.

Botha arrives with reinforcements, (midday).

About midday, an hour before the rear-guard halted, the conditions of the combat had been wholly altered by the arrival of Louis Botha with a reinforcement of five hundred burghers of the Ermelo and Carolina commandos and Swaziland Police. As soon as Benson had penetrated to the heart of the high veld, Grobler sent word that the moment for intervention had come. Botha was seventy miles from the scene of action. So rapid, thoroughly screened and accurately timed was his march, that beyond a general apprehension that he might appear in the Bethal district, no hint of his movements reached British ears until he had appeared on the battlefield of Bakenlaagte at the decisive phase of the action. To give Woolls-Sampson's agents no time to discover his approach, he had covered the last thirty miles at a stretch. Soon after 1 o'clock a marked increase of pressure on the rear-guard gave Anley his first inkling of the change in the situation. He had already sent warning messages to Benson, and at 1.15 he sent another, couched in more urgent terms. At the same time he abandoned the two bogged wagons and ordered a retreat to the next ridge (marked A on the map), about a thousand yards to the north. Just at this time the pom-pom jammed, and was sent on with a small escort into camp; the rest of the Yorkshire L.I. company, which hitherto had been supporting it, now reinforcing the rear-screen. Soon after his arrival at Ridge A, Anley was joined by Benson himself, bringing a

The rear-guard retires to Ridge A.

Benson reinforces the rear-guard,

reinforcement of two weak squadrons of the Scottish Horse, about a hundred rifles in all, under the officer commanding the regiment, Major F. D. Murray. Benson's first idea was to rescue the two bogged wagons; but, recognising the vigour of the Boer attack, he changed his mind and after a few minutes ordered a retirement to the next natural line of defence.

and orders a retreat to Gun Hill about 2 P.M.

Between Ridge A and the camp, some 1,500 yards from the former and 2,000 from the latter, was another ridge, afterwards known as Gun Hill, a mere undulation, but somewhat higher and more strongly defined than any of its fellows in the heaving sea of veld. It was to this position that Benson ordered the rear-guard to retire. But before describing the movement, we must pause to survey the rest of the field at that critical moment.

Tactical situation at this moment.

A word by way of preface. It seems clear that, until he actually reached the rear-guard, Benson had not begun to realise the nature of the peril which threatened his column. To hustle a rear-guard into camp with an exceptional show of vigour, especially under the present conditions of wind and weather, was a common feature of Boer tactics. Had he given full credit to Anley's warnings, fond as he was of exposing himself to danger, he would scarcely have gone in person to a point where he necessarily lost central control. His chief preoccupation during the last hour seems to have been to get his infantry safely into camp, so as to leave the mounted troops free to manœuvre independently. Beyond sending two field-guns to take post on Gun Hill, he had issued no specific orders of his own for the strengthening of that point. These two guns of the 84th Battery, under Lieutenant Maclean, were at the present moment just unlimbering on Gun Hill. They had come up unescorted, for reasons which will appear, but on the hill they had found an escort in twenty men of the 25th (or 60th Rifles) M.I., under Sergeant Ashfield. These troopers were part of a thin mounted screen, formed by the 60th Rifles M.I. and extending in a rough arc, whose average radius was about a mile, around the farm Nooitgedacht. Of the points held by this screen, the next in tactical import-

ance to Gun Hill was a slight eminence 1,200 yards to the north-west. Here was a company under Captain Crum, and one field-gun. To the north again of Crum on another slight elevation was a company under Captain Lynes, with one field-gun. Between was half a company of infantry. Beyond, on the lower ground at Nooitgedacht farm-house, the convoy was in process of being parked. Three companies of Buffs, under their commanding officer, Major Dauglish, were already on or around the bivouac ground; and two more companies, under Major Eales, were about half-way between Gun Hill and the farm. The troops thus far mentioned, scattered as they were, were not abnormally distributed; but between Gun Hill and Ridge A, at the points marked on the map, were two stranded detachments of infantry which, in the event of a sudden retirement of the rear-guard, could not fail to be in a wholly false position. One was Greatwood's company of fifty Buffs, which had originally belonged to the rear-guard, but had been ordered later to march with the tail of the convoy. Whether they were delayed by the bogged wagons or had fallen behind from fatigue, is not clear. At any rate, they were now barely half-way to Gun Hill. More to the west and nearer Gun Hill was another party of thirty Buffs, under Lieutenant Lynch. Earlier in the day, at the time when the convoy was leaving Ridge A, this party had been detached from A Company to serve as an improvised escort to Maclean's guns. When those guns galloped over to Gun Hill, the infantry were out-distanced and were now at the point indicated.

The rear-guard retires from Ridge A, followed by a Boer charge.

To return to Ridge A. When the order to retire was given, the Scottish Horse and the 3rd M.I., each leaving a section to cover the movement, mounted their horses and began to trot away. As they did so, a swarm of Boers on horseback appeared on the misty sky-line to their rear, and followed them up at a gallop. By a skilful use of the inequalities of the ground and with the aid of the thick weather, Louis Botha had succeeded in massing 800–900 men in this quarter of the field. With a quick grasp of the position he had seen the opportunity for a decisive stroke.

A series of weak detachments, strung out over two miles of country, some in the act of retiring; beyond, a huge convoy, which was certain to distract the attention of the bulk of the hostile force; such was the British situation. Botha ordered a charge.

The rear-guard reaches Gun Hill and Ridge B.

There was a race for Gun Hill and the Boers gained rapidly. Benson, with the Scottish Horse and Yorkshire Light Infantry company, made for the two guns on the hill itself; Anley, with the North Lancashire company, for another undulation marked as Ridge B, some 1,500 yards to the east. The guns were reached and their small escort of the 60th Rifles was found lined to the front. Major Murray was now heard shouting to the troopers "to stop and hold the ridge, or else they'd lose the guns," and by all, save a few stragglers, the appeal was nobly answered. Horses were hurriedly sent to the rear, the escort was drawn in close to the guns, while the Yorkshiremen and Scottish Horse spread out in a long irregular line to right and left. A little way behind the hill was the disabled pom-pom, with its escort of Yorkshire Light Infantry under Lieutenant Brewis. Brewis sent a few men on with the gun and with the rest joined his comrades on the hill.

The Boer charge.

In the meantime, the covering sections of Scottish Horse and Yorkshire Light Infantry had also abandoned Ridge A, and with the drum of the Boer hoofs only a hundred yards behind them were galloping for dear life to Gun Hill. The charge, led by Grobler, Erasmus and Britz, was gathering weight, momentum and symmetry at every moment. A large group, which had been massing behind the farm Kruisemefontein, joined in on the right, others reinforced the left. Extended, finally, over a front of nearly a mile and a half, firing from the saddle, goading forward their tired little ponies, venting in wild shouts the accumulated exasperation of many long months, the long line of Boers swept forward across the valley. A small portion of the line, that representing the extreme right, galloped towards Ridge B; another portion, the extreme left, joined by detached parties which had long been hovering to the west, made for Crum's small party of the 60th and for the detachment to the north of

him; but the main part, inclining slightly to their left and lessening their intervals, converged upon Gun Hill. Two trifling obstacles lay in their path, Greatwood's company of Buffs and Lynch's party of thirty Buffs. Neither had any chance and the first was surmounted without a struggle. The young subaltern was wounded in the first onset. To his men Boers and British seemed to be intermingled, for the covering sections of Scottish Horse and M.I. were on the point of being overtaken; fire had to be withheld until they had passed, and the instant they had passed, the enemy in overwhelming force followed. Dropping a few men to disarm their prisoners, the Boers swept on. Lynch's party made a fierce resistance, lost nineteen killed and wounded, and was overpowered. With scarcely a check the charge continued; it caught, swallowed up and captured both the covering sections of Scottish Horse and M.I., and ended, finally, in the hollow at the foot of Gun Hill. This was dead ground both from Ridge B and Gun Hill, and here the Boers flung themselves from their ponies and pressed on foot up the hill, firing and shouting as they came.

Infantry detachments overwhelmed

Covering sections captured.

Gun Hill reached.

A murderous conflict at close quarters now began. Benson's scanty line, some 180 men in all, was overlapped at either end. From both flanks, but especially from the front, where only thirty yards of ant-heap-dotted grass separated the nearest combatants, a rain of fire was poured in. The guns, posted about twenty yards apart, fired three rounds of case and then were silent, every man of the detachment serving them being killed or wounded. The battery commander, Colonel Guinness, who had accompanied Benson to Ridge A, had returned with him to the hill and was now close to the guns, fired the last round himself and then called for the limbers and teams, which were standing on the reverse side of the ridge. As soon as they topped the skyline, drivers, teams and the sergeant-major who led them, dropped in their tracks like corn under the scythe. Guinness and Maclean were shot soon afterwards. Still, there stood the guns, as they had stood at Vlakfontein, dumb emblems of honour, more eloquent in silence than in speech.

The fight at Gun Hill.

Of the Scottish Horse the gallant Murray, plying his

pistol from behind an ant-heap, was one of the first to fall; Captains Lindsay and Inglis and Lieutenant Woodman, all of the same regiment, and Captain Thorold and Lieutenants Brooke and Shepherd of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, were killed soon afterwards. Benson himself, badly wounded in the knee, had refused to be carried away and was now crawling from point to point in the firing-line, encouraging all around him with a splendid example of coolness and courage. Other examples were not lacking. Benson's Assistant Staff Officer, young Eyre Lloyd of the Coldstream Guards, had been occupied in laying out the camp, but, divining the predicament of the rear-guard, had determined to join his colonel. Technically, it was a departure from duty, but one that it is hard to censure. At a moment when it was death to appear on the skyline, he galloped up to the rear of the guns, dismounted and threw his reins to a trooper. Trooper and horse fell dead as he did so. Scarcely appearing to notice what had happened, he sauntered quietly towards Benson, upright, unarmed, the target of a score of Boer rifles, and fell, mortally wounded, within a few paces of his chief. Lloyd was not the only man to court death on the fatal hill. Quartermaster-sergeant Warnock, of the Scottish Horse, whose place was with the convoy, left it to join his comrades in the place of peril. Aware that their ammunition was very low, he took charge of two ammunition carts which were standing at the foot of the hill, and, together with Corporal McCarthy and Private Cunningham, crawled up with some boxes of cartridges. Cunningham was killed; the other two threw the ammunition right and left to all who could reach it. Warnock then took a dead man's rifle, and with reckless audacity crawled from ant-heap to ant-heap, methodically picking off Boer after Boer, until he emerged outside the British firing-line. There he was wounded in three places. None who saw it will forget the behaviour of this gallant old soldier*; but the eye-witnesses were growing terribly few. All down the line, Yorkshiremen, Scotsmen, Rifles and gunners had been mown down in scores under the fierce converging fire. One determined and united rush must have

* Warnock had previously served for 21 years in the Scottish Borderers.

carried the position; but the steady fire and unfaltering demeanour of the little band of heroes availed to defer that rush. Man by man they had to be exterminated before the guns could be carried.

The hill is not reinforced.

No reinforcements reached the hill. Of the troops not already engaged the nearest were two weak companies of infantry under Major Eales, which at the moment of Botha's charge were between Gun Hill and the farm, heading towards the latter with orders to go into camp. When the rear-guard reached Gun Hill, one of Benson's staff rode over and ordered these companies to reinforce the hill. They turned back, lost thirty-three men from the deadly fire which swept over the crest, but were unable to affect the issue. Eales, a very gallant officer, rode forward to the crest in person and was killed. In the rest of the field, during the twenty or twenty-five minutes which constituted the crisis of the action, few persons seem to have realised that a mortal struggle was raging on Gun Hill. All day there had been an incessant fusillade from the rear-guard, and Botha, while massing in force to the south, had taken care to demonstrate at every point round the camp. The greater part of the mounted troops, scattered about in small detachments, with no central reserve, were either engaged in the defence of important points, or vigorously threatened. To the east of Gun Hill, the North Lancashire Company was isolated and fully occupied with the defence of Ridge B; to the north-west of Gun Hill, Crum's small detachment, aided by a few infantry, bravely maintained an unequal conflict with a greatly superior force.

The Boers capture the hill.

After about fifteen minutes' fighting, the Boers attacking the hill rose to their feet, as though about to rush the position. There were still three or four dozen effective rifles on the ridge; a ragged volley crackled out, and the Boers sank to earth again. There they remained from five to ten minutes endeavouring to pick off the last survivors. It was during this period that Benson, who had again been hit—a flesh-wound in the arm—called for a volunteer to take a message to the camp forbidding ambulances to be sent out to the hill, on the ground that the Boers would use the mules

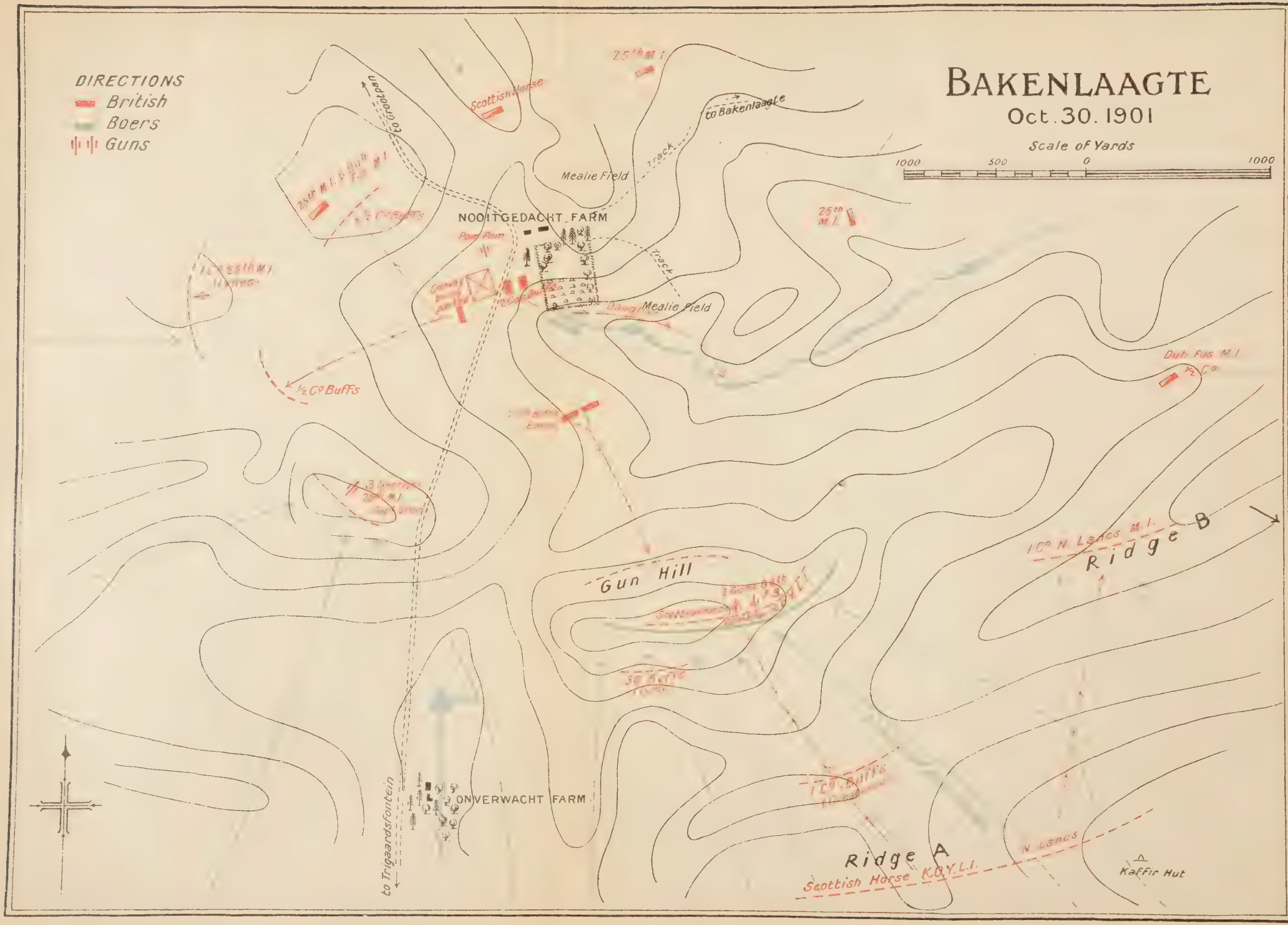
for the purpose of removing the guns. Trooper Grierson of the Scottish Horse rose to take the message and was immediately hit in the foot. The same bullet struck Benson and inflicted a mortal wound. Some Boers, led by a man with a grey pony, now walked up towards the guns, as though to take possession. A few unwounded men among the escort delivered a last volley: the man with the grey pony dropped and the others recoiled. The respite was only momentary. In another minute the whole Boer line, four or five deep, rose up like one man and stood firing indiscriminately at everything that moved on the ridge. Then with cries of triumph it surged forward and the hill was lost. The captured guns were swung round and a few shells were fired at the camp. But the Boers, who had lost nearly a hundred of their best and bravest men in overcoming the defence, were in no mood to press their advantage resolutely. Those of the stormers who advanced down the reverse slope were checked by the fire of the infantry.

The Boers abandon the hill, but remove the guns.

So ended a fight unique in the annals of the war. The defenders of the hill had been almost annihilated. All the officers present were killed or wounded. Of 79 Scottish Horse only 6 were unhurt, of 32 gunners only 3, of 20 60th Rifles only 3 and of 40 Yorkshiremen only 5. Some of the survivors escaped to the camp after the final rush; a few lay out on the ridge, overlooked in the general confusion, and witnessed the last and saddest scene in the drama of Bakenlaagte, when to the victorious horde of Boers, stripping and plundering, there succeeded a rain of shrapnel from the British guns in camp. The shell fire was effectual. The hill, strewn with the wreckage of the defending force, was for the time abandoned by the Boers, and no effort to retake it was made from the British side. At nightfall, ambulances went out to the succour of the wounded and under their cover the Boers removed the guns with oxen. At nightfall, too, Crum's gallant detachment, now completely isolated, was withdrawn to camp.

The camp intrenched.

Benson, situated as he had been at the point of utmost peril, had not been able to control the general situation. After the loss of Gun Hill and the news of Benson's mortal


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
BAKENLAAGTE
Oct. 30. 1901
Scale of Yards
1000
500
0
1000
to Bakenlaagte
Scottish Horse
25th M I
Mealie Field
Track
NOOITGEDACHT FARM
Pom Pom
½ Co Buffs
Dub Fus M I
½ Co
1 Co N Lancs M I
Ridge B
Gun Hill
to Krugersfontein Farm
ONVERWACHT FARM
to Trigaardsfontein
1 Co Buffs
Ridge A
Scottish Horse K.O.Y.L.I.
N Lancs
Kaffir Hut

wound, some doubt arose as to who should take the command—Colonel Woolls-Sampson or Major Dauglish of the Buffs, the latter being the senior imperial officer. The point, by mutual consent, was settled in favour of Sampson. Both officers took the view that the safety of the main body and the convoy was already sufficiently compromised, and that an effort to recover the guns was not justifiable. The column, certainly, was severely shaken. With the minor losses of the day reckoned, it had lost a quarter of its strength—238 men killed and wounded and about 120 captured. The huge convoy was not only an impediment to free action, but a source of serious anxiety. Sampson, therefore, took prompt steps to secure and intrench an inner line of defence. So effectually was this done that Botha, who had issued orders for the camp to be stormed in the night, abandoned his design and contented himself with the results already achieved. He had, indeed, gained only the bare measure of success which his masterly tactics deserved. Had the defenders of Gun Hill faltered appreciably, the momentum already gained might well have carried the Boers straight into the camp, with far more disastrous consequences to the British. The heroic stand of the rear-guard places Bakenlaagte among the glorious memories of British arms.

Death of Benson.

Benson, rapidly sinking under his wounds, was brought into camp at 9 P.M. His first thought was for the safety of the column. Refusing medical help until the doctors should be less busy, he sent at once for Sampson, confirmed him in the command and gave particular directions for the defence of the camp. Sampson was able to assure him that the force was already prepared for any emergency. Benson died at 6 o'clock on the following morning. Struck down in the full tide of a fine career, the young colonel of artillery had nevertheless done sound and lasting work. When the whole tendency of British military policy was to sacrifice enterprise to organisation, he showed an example of fearless initiative. He sought risks with an ardour and obstinacy which were at once his best safeguard and his final justification. This is no paradox; for if his spirit had been the dominant spirit, the risks he and others took would

have been infinitely less. How was it that Botha was able to make his dramatic appearance on the field of Bakenlaagte and to drive home that magnificent charge? The reason is written plain in the events of the two preceding months. He and his men should have returned, if they returned at all, from that long expedition to Zululand shattered and cowed. Instead, thanks to the hesitation of their enemies, they returned with the moral and discipline which carried them to Gun Hill.

The column held its intrenched camp until November 1, when two relieving columns came up, the first from Leeuwkop, under Colonel Barter, and the second under Colonel Gilbert Hamilton, who with 2,000 mounted men of De Lisle's and Allenby's columns made a forced march of 55 miles from Standerton to Bakenlaagte. Though the march was a good performance, relief, with these fine columns, might well have been converted into vigorous reprisals upon Botha, whose men were still in the neighbourhood. Sampson needed only the approach of supports to regain his freedom of action. He now took the column back to Brugspruit.

II

Moedwil

Other incidents of the spring revival.

HAVING described Botha's raid upon Natal and its direct sequel, Bakenlaagte, we have now to relate the other incidents of the Boer spring revival of 1901. Of these incidents, the most important occurred in the Western Transvaal and was closely connected with the dislocation of the British forces caused by Botha's raid.

The Western Transvaal, mid-Sept.

Spring had opened in the Western Transvaal with a situation very similar to that in the Eastern Transvaal. The last operation of the winter, a big combined movement early in September against Kemp in the Zwartruggens,* having ended in failure, Fetherstonhaugh, controlling Hickie and Ingouville-Williams, had withdrawn to Ventersdorp and Methuen to Mafeking, while Gilbert Hamilton, Allenby and Garratt

* See page 327.

were despatched, as we have seen, to Natal.* One column only was left in the neighbourhood of the Magaliesberg and Zwartruggens, that of Colonel Kekewich, who had succeeded Dixon in the command of the Naauwpoort force. It was fortunate that Kekewich, like Benson, had courage and nerve of a high order; for the men against whom he was pitted were quite as formidable as the picked commandos of the east. De la Rey and Kemp, partly from a desire to replenish their failing stores of ammunition, partly to show their contempt for Kitchener's proclamation, had resolved to make some vigorous effort, and it was not long before they obtained a promising opportunity.

Kekewich's column.

Kekewich's column was substantially the same as that which had fought under Dixon at Vlakfontein. The artillery had been reduced to three guns of the 28th Battery under Captain Laird and one pom-pom under Captain Wheeler; but the Scottish Borderers under Major Mayne, the Derbyshires under Colonel Wylly, the 1st Scottish Horse under Major Duff, and the 7th Imperial Yeomanry under Captain Tristram of the 12th Lancers, had undergone only the usual changes inseparable from a long campaign. All had received fresh drafts, the Scottish Horse in particular having just been strengthened by two squadrons fresh from home. The column, when it left Naauwpoort for the Magaliesberg on September 13, had a total strength of 800 infantry, 560 mounted men, three guns and a pom-pom. Wylly commanded the infantry, Duff the mounted troops and Wheeler the guns.

Kekewich reaches Moedwil, Sept. 29.

Kekewich's first operations were in a comparatively safe neighbourhood, the northern slopes of the main Magaliesberg range. After ten days' clearing work, at the end of which the column suffered a first reduction by the withdrawal of the Scottish Borderers, Kekewich passed through Magato Nek and entered the Zwartruggens. This wild region might well be compared to the haunted forests of fairyland, so mysterious and elusive were the Boers who haunted

* As a small step towards meeting the deficiency in troops a column of 250 M.I., 450 infantry, and 3 guns, was organised in the middle of September and placed under the command of Colonel Hicks (R. Dub. Fus.). It operated for the next month in and about the Gatsrand.

it, so sudden and startling their concentrations. For a week the column travelled north, first along the valley of the Eland's River, where a night raid directed on Crocodile Drift left the tired troopers staring only at some smouldering camp-fires, then, in obedience to orders from Pretoria, back again towards Magato Nek. On the afternoon of the 29th the column halted at the farm Moedwil, on the right or eastern bank of the Selons River and about seven miles from the Nek. At this point the main road from Zeerust to Rustenburg crosses the Selons by a good wagon drift, and it was just to the north of this road and about 500 yards from the drift that Kekewich placed his camp. On the same evening his force underwent a further diminution. A convoy of empty wagons, together with a batch of prisoners and refugees, had to be sent back to Naauwpoort, and a company of Derbys and one and a half squadrons of Scottish Horse (some of whom, being time-expired, were not intended to return) accompanied it as escort. The convoy started at 7 P.M. Taken with the loss of the Scottish Borderers, this reduction left Kekewich with only 930 rifles.* Fetherstonhaugh's columns were operating thirty miles away to the south-east, but not in concert with Kekewich.

The position at Moedwil.

In that bushy and broken country, safe sites for camping-grounds were difficult to find. That selected on this occasion by Kekewich had strong natural advantages and one great defect. Southward of the main drift, the river, running in a bed fifty feet deep, thickly fringed with rocks and bush, bent sharply to the eastward, half encircling the camp and giving it excellent protection. But west of the river the ground rose steadily for a considerable distance, and was thickly sprinkled with patches of bush. Hence a difficulty in the placing of the western pickets. Posted on the line of the river they would be too near the camp ; posted in any commanding position on the farther side they would be too distant. Of the two horns of this dilemma, Kekewich chose the first, making the right bank of the river, save at one point, the western limit of his outpost line. The exception was a double picket of infantry, posted 1,000 yards south-

Map, p. 382.

* Derbys, 370; Scottish Horse, 400; Yeomanry, 160.

west of the drift, near the remains of an old kraal. To the east of the camp, the conditions were more favourable. There the ground was tolerably open for nearly a mile, and although it rose slightly from the river eastwards, its configuration was such that pickets could be planted at an effective distance. The camp faced west and the outpost-line was manned as follows: H Company of the Derbys held the southern semicircle of the perimeter of defence, including the approach to the main drift; the mounted troops held the northern semicircle, a squadron of Yeomanry guarding the river-bank to the front and right front of the camp, and a squadron of Scottish Horse prolonging the line to the right and rear.

De la Rey's attack, Sept. 30, 4.45 A.M.

While the camp was sleeping, the denizens of the "haunted forest" were collecting as though by magic. With the exception of a small force reported at Buffelshoek, ten miles to the south-east, Kekewich believed the immediate neighbourhood to be perfectly clear. But De la Rey's scouts, under Boshoff, had stalked the column for a week, while their general held his scattered bands ready for one of those extraordinarily swift and secret concentrations which had so often defied the intelligence service of British columns. On this night he had summoned 1,000 men to gather at a point close to the British camp, and, like de Wet on a famous occasion three months later, he based his plan of attack on a careful preliminary study of the British outpost line. On the east the *terrain* was easy, but the pickets were thrown well out; on the west the precipitous river-bank was an obstacle which might well have deterred the most daring of leaders, but there was only one outlying picket. The plan was that the main body, under Van Tonder, Plessis, Fourie, Boshoff and Coetzee, was to make its way in the darkness to the river below the camp, while two flanking detachments, one under Steenekamp and Oosthuizen, the other under Kemp and Van Heerden, were to make a wide detour by the north and south respectively, and to work round to the east. At daylight the main body, making a frontal attack on the camp, was to drive the British into the arms of Kemp and Steenekamp. Up to a certain point the plan developed smoothly. Stealing

down the scrubby and broken slopes which lie to the west of the Selons and making skilful use of a dry creek which ran at an acute angle to the river, Van Tonder, Plessis, and Boshoff gained the river by 4.30 A.M., while it was still dark, and concealed themselves among the bushes and rocks of the right bank. Fourie and Coetzee, taking a more southerly line, and careful, like the rest, to give a sufficiently wide berth to the outlying Derbyshire picket, struck the river higher up and began to work down-stream towards their comrades. But the flanking parties, which seem to have been late at the point of concentration, were not nearly ready. Imperfectly placed as the British outposts were, it was not to their credit that the main body of Boers should have been able to gain the river-bed unobserved. It was not till 4.45 A.M. that a patrol of the Devon Yeomanry, moving on the north-west of the camp and searching the river-bed, stumbled upon some Boers. The patrol opened fire, the camp was aroused, and De la Rey had to precipitate his attack. Although somewhat premature, it was exceedingly formidable. Van Tonder, Plessis and Boshoff, who were all in position north of the drift, at once charged through the scrub of the right bank and overwhelmed the outposts. Two small Yeomanry pickets, resisting desperately, were cut to pieces in succession. The same fate overtook a stronger picket of thirteen Derbys under Sergeant Chambers, who were holding some rocks overlooking the main drift and who fought with fine tenacity.* Fourie and Coetzee soon came into line, and by 5 o'clock several hundred Boers had gained the crest of the steep bank and were pouring a volume of converging fire into the tents and horse-lines of the camp, which, in the first grey of the dawn, were dimly visible on the sky-line.

Conduct of the defence, 5–5.30 A.M.

Sudden and searching was the test to which the moral of the force was subjected, and well it stood the test. From Kekewich downwards, the officers acted with coolness and resource. General orders were out of the question;

* Of the 13, 12 were killed or wounded. Only 3 of the wounded survived—Chambers, Dixon, and Caveny. These and Private Picard received promotion, and Chambers the D.C. medal.

tactics were out of the question; the one thing necessary was to get every available man to the front and establish a firing line. This was done, and, considering the darkness, the rain of bullets and the mobs of terrified horses and mules stampeding madly through the camp, done with astonishingly little confusion and delay. The men themselves seemed to realise what was wanted just as clearly as their officers, so that all ranks worked steadily to overcome the emergency. By 5 o'clock, when the daylight was just beginning to gain strength, most of the effective riflemen were lying on the slopes to the west of the camp and firing steadily at the Boer line of attack. There in the still imperfect light they were far safer than in the camp, which furnished an easy target to the Boer rifles. Kekewich had given orders for two squadrons of the Scottish Horse to saddle up. Colonel Duff, Captain Field, Lieutenant Loring and many of the rank and file were wounded in endeavouring to carry out what proved to be a hopeless task. Kekewich himself was twice wounded, but continued to exercise command. Horses and mules went down in hundreds and a quantity stampeded in the direction of Magato Nek. The gunners suffered severely. One gun detachment was destroyed and the pom-pom jammed; but the other guns were used with some effect. A Maxim belonging to the Derbyshires came into action at the south-west corner of the camp, and was served with remarkable devotion. Captains Keller and Baldwin were badly wounded here; and out of a detachment of nine men, six were hit. Private Bees received the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in fetching water from the river under short-range fire from the Boers.

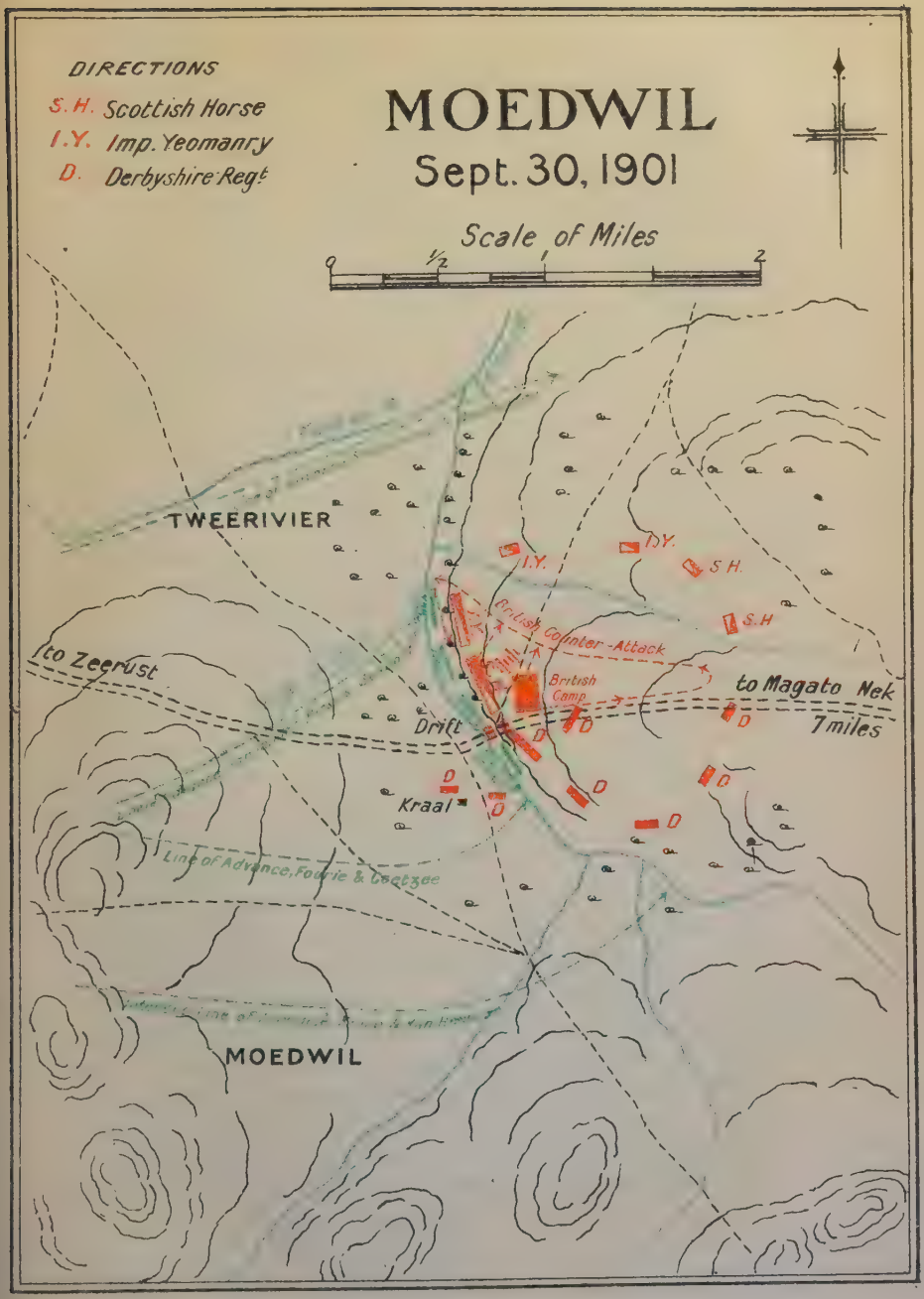
Repulse of the attack, 5.30–6.15 A.M.

The stronger the light grew, the heavier became the casualties on the slope above the river. Nevertheless the Boers gained no ground, and themselves suffered considerably from the increasingly accurate fire. Kemp's flank attack on the British left came to nothing. Steenekamp, however, seems to have made a faint effort to develop his movement on the British right; for at 5.30 a report went about that a body of Boers had worked round from

the north to the east, or rear of the camp. The report reached Major Watts of the Derbyshire Regiment, who promptly went to the camp and collected a party of orderlies, servants, cooks and other details not already engaged. With these he filled a gap on the east. Finding after a few minutes that there was nothing in the nature of a serious attack to repel, he swung his men round and, of his own initiative, began what proved to be the decisive movement of the day. Advancing north-west, towards the extreme left of the main Boer attack, he was joined, as he passed the camp, by Major Browne of the Border Regiment, who had also been beating up details, and again, as he approached the firing line, by Captain Mackenzie and a few men of the Scottish Horse. When Watts reached the firing line some Yeomanry, together with "C" and "D" Squadrons of the Scottish Horse under Captains Dick-Cunyngham and Rattray, reinforced the advance, which now resolved itself into a most effective turning movement. With fixed bayonets the men charged down the river-bank, drove in the enemy's left and threatened to enfilade and roll up the whole Boer line. This was about 6 o'clock. The Boers, who had already begun to retire in twos and threes, now gave way completely. With these seasoned veterans there was no panic or disorder; but the repulse was final. By 6.15 the last of them had galloped away over the western sky-line. Pursuit was impracticable. There was scarcely one unwounded horse in the camp.

Losses.

Kekewich had lost in killed and wounded 214 officers and men, nearly a quarter of his fighting strength. These casualties, together with the loss of 327 horses and several hundred draught-beasts, crippled him for the time being. De la Rey's losses appear to have been about sixty, including the brave Commandant Boshoff, who led a few of his scouts actually into the camp and was there tackled and bayonetted by Farrier-Sergeant Kirkpatrick of the Scottish Horse. Like Vlakfontein, Moedwil is a fight upon which both sides may look back with pride. De la Rey's stealthy concentration, his audacious plan of attack, his vehement assault and orderly retreat, stamped him anew


DIRECTIONS
S.H. Scottish Horse
I.Y. Imp. Yeomanry
D. Derbyshire Regt
MOEDWIL
Sept. 30, 1901
Scale of Miles
0
½
1
2
TWEERIVIER
I.Y.
I.Y.
S.H.
S.H.
British Counter-Attack
British Camp
to Zeerust
to Magato Nek
7 miles
Drift
Kraal
D
Line of Advance, Fourie & Coetzee
MOEDWIL

as a daring and resourceful guerilla leader, possessing the unbounded confidence of his men. In the British leader he met his match. Self-reliant himself, Kekewich had inspired his officers and men with self-reliance. Hence, in the uproar of a surprise which gave no scope for generalship, nerve and constancy averted what might have been a terrible disaster. All units and all ranks did equally well. The Derbys, matching their prowess at Vlakfontein, were foremost in the counter-stroke at Moedwil. The Yeomanry bore themselves as bravely as veteran regulars; and the 1st Scottish Horse, if they were not called upon to undergo the extreme sacrifices made a month later by their sister corps at Bakenlaagte, fought not a whit less keenly. It is especially pleasant to note that the two new squadrons, never till then under fire, took a prominent part in the decisive movement of the day.

Fetherstonhaugh.

The distant booming of the guns at Moedwil was heard in Fetherstonhaugh's camp at Kwaggafontein, 25 miles to the south. Signal communication having been gained with Magato Nek, the news was learnt that Kekewich was in difficulties. Sending Williams at once to Moedwil, Fetherstonhaugh followed with Hickie. But De la Rey's force had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. Colonel Wylly, temporarily succeeding Kekewich, brought the column into Rustenburg and Fetherstonhaugh turned back to the south. On October 16 his brigade was broken up, he himself succeeding General Reeves in the control of the Eastern Lines of Communication; Williams going to operate in the north-east, as described in the last chapter,* and Hickie being employed in covering the construction of a blockhouse line between Klerksdorp and Ventersdorp.

Action of Kleinfontein, Oct. 24.

Meanwhile Kekewich, whose wounds were slight, had taken only a few days' rest, and on October 13 was again marching west from Rustenburg to the Zwartruggens. This time he was to co-operate with Methuen, who, on the 2nd, leading two columns, had left Mafeking for Zeerust. The co-operation was unsuccessful. De la Rey was there, but invisible, waiting for another opportunity of attacking an

* See page 361.

isolated force and of winning the supplies and ammunition which he had sought in vain at Moedwil. Situations reproduced themselves with monotonous regularity in the Western Transvaal. Six weeks earlier, on his return from a similar expedition, Methuen had been set upon in the Marico valley,* and the same thing happened now. On October 24, during the march back to Zeerust, one of his two columns, consisting of 1,000 rifles and seven guns under Colonel von Donop,† was surprised by De la Rey at Kleinfontein. Unsuspicious of danger, the column, accompanied by a procession of 100 wagons, was marching along one of the worst roads in the Transvaal, fringed with bush and dominated by thickly-timbered heights. Patrols were working on either flank; but in this sort of country Yeomanry scouts were powerless. At 7 A.M., some Boers having showed themselves on high ground to the front, the advance-guard guns halted and opened fire. Then, without a moment's warning, some 500 Boers under Kemp, Steenekamp, Oosthuizen and other leaders charged down from the heights on the left in three ordered lines, struck the centre of the mule-convoy, shot down numbers of the native drivers and threw the whole into confusion. While some Boers endeavoured to drive off the wagons, the rest whirled away to their right and fell upon the rear-guard, which consisted of two guns of the 4th Battery under Lieutenant Hill, a company of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers under Captain Girdwood and a company of the 5th Yeomanry under Lieutenant Cheape. The troops, resisting with splendid bravery, received severe punishment. Both gun-detachments were cut to pieces; the Fusiliers lost half their number in killed and wounded; the Yeomanry a quarter of their number and half their horses, and the guns for a considerable time were in Boer hands; but, the teams having been shot down, there was no means of removing them. Meanwhile the column was cut in two, and fully two hours elapsed before von Donop was able to get back to the relief of the rear-guard. Then the Boers, who

* See Chapter XI., p. 327.

† 5th I.Y., 680; 1st L. N. Lanc. Regt., 190; 1st North. Fusiliers, 140; 4 guns, 4th Battery; 2 pom-poms; 1 howitzer, 37th Battery.

had succeeded in driving away twelve wagons and in burning one limber, were beaten off. They had suffered the loss—heavy for them—of 60 killed and wounded, including Commandant Oosthuizen. The British casualties were 84.*

III

Slangfontein, Quaggafontein and Modderfontein

Among the Boers of the Free State there was no general revival in the spring of 1901. In most districts the burghers took advantage of Botha's diversion against Natal to gain a little welcome rest. In the south-east corner, however, two small British reverses, occurring within five days of September 15, showed with unpleasant plainness the view taken of Kitchener's proclamation. It will be remembered that when Smuts broke into Cape Colony in the early days of September, Kritzinger, surrounded by an assemblage of columns under Charles Knox,† was left behind at Zastron. During the next ten days Kritzinger, together with a number of small local bands under Brand, the head of the district, and Commandants Ackermann and Coetzee, roamed about defying pursuit. On the British side there seems to have been a lack of skilled scouting and skilled co-operation, while the troops were wretchedly mounted. Between the 15th and the 17th Brand and Kritzinger each made a partial concentration and broke away in opposite directions. Brand rode north towards the Bloemfontein-Thaba 'Nchu line of blockhouses, Kritzinger south to the Orange River.

Kritzinger and Brand in the southern Free State, Sept. 15–17. (See p. 318.)

Near Sannah's Post, Brand and his lieutenants found an easy prey in the shape of a small force of 170 M.I., 30 Constabulary and two guns of "U" Battery, which, under the command of a militia officer, had gone out from Boesman's Kop, a post on the blockhouse line, to raid a farm named

Action of Slangfontein, Sept. 19.

* Among those who displayed exceptional gallantry on this occasion were Lieut. H. N. Hill (killed), Sergeant Browning and Corporal Hatcher of the Artillery; Lieut. Hobbs, R.E.; Sergeants Bailey and Miller, of the North. Fusiliers; Captain Laing and Sergeant House, of the 5th I.Y.

† Plumer (two columns under Jervis and Colvin), Rawlinson, Lord Basing, Thorneycroft (two columns under Minchin and Copeman), Damant.

Vlakfontein, some 16 miles to the south. The expedition was made without the knowledge of General Tucker and in complete ignorance of Brand's presence in the neighbourhood. Leaving the Kop * at midnight on the 18th, the force surrounded the farm at daylight on the 19th, and finding it empty, proceeded to deal with a neighbouring farm called Slangfontein. Part of the troops, and with them the guns, occupied a semicircle of three kopjes overlooking Slangfontein on the south and Vlakfontein on the north, while the remainder searched the former farm. Ackermann surrounded the position with 200 men, drove in the search-party, enveloped the two flank kopjes and at 8 A.M. attacked the central kopje, on which the guns and an escort of 40 M.I. were posted. Occupying two dongas and a dam-wall, the Boers poured in a destructive fire to which no effective reply could be made. Owing to the nerveless handling of the mounted troops, it was left to the young subaltern in command of the artillery, Lieutenant Otter-Barry, to protect his guns as best he could. He succeeded in getting some M.I. to cover his rear and right, and he obtained rifles and ammunition for his own gunners and drivers, who, having served their guns till limber-supply was exhausted, could do no more, since access to the single wagon was barred by a fire-swept zone.† These efforts were fruitless. The gallant Otter-Barry was killed at 9 A.M.; Sergeants Talbot and Goodey and Corporal Orchard, who took his place in succession, together with six other men, were struck down also, and at 9.30 the Boers, having driven off the escort, advanced to within thirty yards of the guns. At this point the militia officer in command of the force raised the white flag. Seeing that the casualties of the mounted troops were only fifteen, none of whom were officers, and the surrenders ninety, while Ackermann's strength was only just equal to that of the British force, the whole affair, apart from the fine behaviour of the gunners, must be regarded

* Well known in connection with the battle of Sannah's Post, March, 1900. It stands about midway between Bloemfontein and Sannah's Post.

† Gunner Yerrell was wounded in a brave attempt to bring up ammunition.

as highly discreditable. The captured guns were abandoned by the Boers and recovered a few days later by the British.

Action of Quaggafontein, Sept. 20.

Kritzinger's dash to the Orange led to another small reverse. We must recall to the reader that on General Fitzroy Hart lay the onerous duty of guarding the line of the Orange from Bethulie to the Basuto border. Among the four small columns at his disposal was one composed of Lovat's Scouts, 200 strong, under Colonel the Hon. Andrew Murray. The duties of these columns were heavy and multifarious, and it so happened that, a few days prior to the 20th of September, half the Scouts under Lord Lovat had been called away to relieve a village in Cape Colony which was threatened by some rebels. Colonel Murray, with the remainder, only 96 in number, and one field-gun, was on the Free State side of the Orange, near the Herschel border. It was now that Kritzinger, with 300 men, made his appearance in the neighbourhood. Recognising the danger, Murray twice shifted his camp and sent back warning messages to the other half of the regiment, now on its way back. On the night of the 20th he camped at Quaggafontein Drift, somewhat reassured by the fact that during the afternoon Kritzinger had been seen to ride away to the west. This was only a feint, and after dark the Boers returned. Murray was a very brave and, generally, a very careful officer. He seems on this occasion to have taken due military precautions, but it is obvious that with so small a force he could not establish a thoroughly effective screen of pickets. Some of his men, moreover, seem to have been imperfectly instructed in outpost duties. Suspicious sounds were heard at midnight by a picket on a kopje to the north of the camp. Instead of raising the alarm, a man was sent back to inform Murray. He walked straight into a band of Boers. Having thus intercepted the only warning of his approach, Kritzinger charged into the sleeping camp and shot down officers and men as they struggled out of their blankets. Among the killed were the Colonel and his brother, Captain the Hon. E. O. Murray; 48 others were killed or wounded, and the gun was captured; but it speaks well for the fearless and

stubborn spirit which Murray himself had inculcated that there were no surrenders.

Smuts in Cape Colony, Sept. 3–17. (See p. 319.)

The original failure of Knox's columns to contain Smuts and Kritzinger led indirectly to a third mishap in this unfortunate week. We described in Chapter XI. how Smuts, with his 300 Transvaalers, crossed the Orange on the night of September 3, near the Herschel border. Hart's river detachments having failed to gain touch, French made a strong effort to check this dangerous incursion. Colonels Monro, Western and Pilcher were thrown upon his trail from the north, and when their exertions proved unavailing, a fresh group, directed by Colonel Haig, and including Gorringe, Doran, the 17th Lancers and Scobell (temporarily replaced by Colonel Lukin), was organised. Smuts, with Gorringe and Doran close upon his heels, rode on to the south-west. On the night of September 12 he crossed two railways, the Sterkstroom-Indwe branch at Halseston Station, the East London line at Putter's Kraal, and thence moved in the direction of Tarkastad, laagering on the night of the 14th in the Wildschutsberg. It was of the last importance to keep him out of the midlands, which were ripe for a fresh rebellion. Realising that Gorringe and Doran were not gaining ground, while Lukin, who was coming up from the west, was delayed by rain and heavy roads, Haig, on the 14th-15th, sent round the 17th Lancers by rail from Stormberg to Tarkastad and on the 16th directed the regiment to hold nine miles of the Eland's River, which lay directly in Smuts' path. One of the squadrons, under Captain Sandeman, with a mountain gun under Lieutenant Hay-Coghlan, was deputed to watch Eland's Poort, a gorge through which the river and a road from the north pass. Owing to a sudden flood, the river was impassable, so that Sandeman found himself compelled to camp not, as his instructions had contemplated, on the farther side of the river, but at Modderfontein farm, on the near side, in a bad position, dominated at every point by high ground. He reported his difficulty to Haig and was ordered to remain where he was. On the next morning, which broke very misty, the squadron saddled up, and, the flood having sub-

Action of Modderfontein, Sept. 17.

sided, two troops were sent out to reconnoitre the Poort and another long kloof which ran at right angles to the river. One troop penetrated to the other end of this kloof, eight miles away, could see or hear nothing of any enemy and returned at midday. Leaving pickets round the farm, the squadron then off-saddled to feed horses and have dinner. By a fatality, Smuts had marched into the kloof just as the reconnoitring troop turned back. A farmer gave the necessary hint and in the misty weather Smuts succeeded in approaching the camp undetected and in planting men on high ground to the north and south. By the time the pickets gave the alarm, the fate of the squadron was sealed. Nevertheless, caught as they were by superior numbers in an impossible position, the Lancers made a fight which will redound to the honour of their regiment. Out of six officers, Morritt, Russell, Sheridan and Coghlan were killed and Sandeman and Lord Vivian were wounded. Twenty-six men were killed and 39 wounded. Not until two-thirds of the force were shot down was Smuts able to capture the few survivors, the camp and the mountain gun. In the midst of securing his plunder another squadron of the Lancers came up and forced him to beat a retreat, leaving the gun behind. Unhappily, he had gained what he wanted: rifles, ammunition, remounts, stores and, most important of all, a passage into the midlands, which were soon, under his influence, aflame from end to end.

Combat of Visserkraal, Sept. 16.

On the previous day, 150 miles from Modderfontein, there occurred near Taaibosch, on the DeAar-Naauwpoort railway, a small but stirring combat which deserves to be chronicled here, not for its intrinsic importance, but as a good example of the numberless little skirmishes, most of them lost in oblivion, which went on almost daily in the vast theatre of war, and especially in Cape Colony. Malan, one of the ablest of the Boer leaders in the Colony, was known to be in the neighbourhood of Hanover Road Station with a small commando. The night of September 15 was wild and stormy, and Lieutenants Gurdon-Rebow and Filmer, of the 3rd Grenadier Guards, chose it as a good moment for pouncing on Malan, who in such inclement weather would be

likely to sleep in some neighbouring farm, and not, as was his wont, under the stars. At 7 P.M. the two young officers, with a patrol of twenty-four Guardsmen, started out from Taaibosch. After two hours' floundering through rain and mud in pitchy darkness, they mistook a raging spruit for the road, and had to spend the rest of the night in sodden perplexity. Eight men had lost their way and disappeared. At dawn the rest separated, Filmer with seven men going back to Taaibosch, Gurdon-Rebow with nine men making for Hanover Road, both still thirsting for a fight of some description and to that end prying into farms and making inquiries at every turn. At Visserkraal Gurdon-Rebow sighted five Boers. Galloping off in hot pursuit, he found himself involved in a sharp little action with a party of thirty under Malan himself. For three hours the mimic battle raged, with frontal and flank attacks, enfilading movements, surprises and stratagems of all sorts. At length the combatants were only twenty yards apart, snapping stealthy shots at each other with the utmost keenness. Finally Malan's men dashed forward together, shot the brave Gurdon-Rebow through the head, killed his servant, Hann, and three other men, and forced the remaining five to surrender.

IV

Summary of the Spring Revival

The normal process of attrition.

Independently of the series of actions described in this and the last chapter, the normal process of attrition had continued without a check. During the months of September and October there were 64 mobile columns in the field. Within the same period, whether by death, capture, or voluntary surrender, nearly 4,000 Boers were accounted for; on a rough average, a Boer per day per column. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the statistical criterion was deceptive. While the slow but continuous reduction in the Boer strength denoted the sure march of conquest, a better criterion of the resisting power of the enemy is afforded by an analysis of the actions resulting from the Boer

offensive revival. Disregarding affairs of minor moment, we find that between September 15 and October 30 there were fought nine actions of varying importance, in which the British losses in round numbers were 800 killed and wounded and 560 prisoners of war; while the Boer losses may be fairly estimated at 430 killed and wounded. The figures fairly represent the decided superiority, both tactical and individual, of the Boers at this period. At the same time all the actions bear eloquent witness to the fortitude of the British soldiers, Regulars and Volunteers alike. For the Boers, who needed victories, however small, the moral results were considerable. Just as in May Vlakfontein and Wilmansrust tided them over a critical period of despondency and encouraged them to withstand the winter, so these actions of the spring, although some were costly and unsuccessful, left them with a sense of elation strong enough to warrant continued resistance.

Actions of the spring revival, Sept.-Oct.

On the tactical aspect of these actions one observation may be made. It relates to artillery. In every case the Boers fought without guns. In every case the British had artillery and fought their guns with incomparable gallantry and devotion. In no case, however, did they make effective use of them; while nine were lost to the Boers, who took no trouble to retain them. The inference is unmistakable. Speed, craft, energy, the principal factors of success, were not fostered but discouraged by the possession of artillery. When our troops were on the offensive, the enemy, in nine cases out of ten, fought a series of skilful rear-guard actions, and escaped. Generally this meant that the British commander expended valuable time in the shelling of a thin screen of riflemen on each successive ridge, before sending his mounted men to the assault. For defensive purposes, guns, it is true, were often of great value. Yet even in defence they were sometimes more of an embarrassment than a safeguard. In attacking a column on the march, the Boers, instead of advertising their intentions by a preparatory shell-fire, were apt to concentrate rapidly against a weak rearguard, where there were always guns to be found, and to charge home. The guns made but a rallying-point, and often a tactically

Tactical value of artillery.

false rallying-point. If they were saved, no tactical advantage was gained; if they were lost, some prestige was lost; little else; for the Boers, possessing no resources for repair and no reserves of ammunition, were rarely able to make any use of their prizes. A fear always existed that they might imperil the blockhouse lines, whose little tin works could have been blown to pieces by shells. The fear was somewhat exaggerated. Even had the Boers possessed anything in the nature of an arsenal, they would hardly have lessened their mobility and vitiated their tactics on the chance of smashing a few blockhouses. The objects were incompatible, and of the two, tactical excellence was the more important.

The Royal Artillery Mounted Rifles.

While the enemy, ever since the cessation of regular war, had been quick to recognise the disadvantages of artillery, the British had been slow to appreciate the same truth. This was natural; for the traditional reliance on artillery, as a moral as well as tactical support to the two other arms, was upheld and even intensified by the consciousness of inferiority with the rifle. Towards the end of 1901, however, steps were taken at last to reduce the number of guns carried with columns and to make a more practical use of the superb body of seasoned men who manned the British artillery in South Africa. Early in December the first order was promulgated for the transformation of batteries into mounted riflemen. Thenceforward the Royal Artillery Mounted Rifles became an important element in Kitchener's army. In March 1902 they numbered 2,300, representing twelve batteries of field artillery and six of horse artillery.

V

Miscellaneous Operations in September and October

Other operations, Sept.-Oct.

Before closing this chapter, it will be convenient to carry the history of other operations in the Free State and Cape Colony up to the same point as those in the Transvaal, that is to say, to the end of October.

Of the Free State there is little more to record. While the Natal campaign lasted, Elliot was occupied in watching

the line of the Drakensberg; and it was only towards the end of October that De Lisle and Broadwood were able to operate with any freedom. The former took a small laager on the Wilge River on Oct. 15; the latter made an expedition to Witzieshoek in Rundle's district, and captured a quantity of ammunition. In the meantime Rimington, with his independent column, which was steadily growing in smartness, continued his raids in the Heilbron and Kroonstad districts, and between Sept. 14 and Oct. 3, by using methods similar to those of Benson, took three small laagers.* Similar work was done by the 1st Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Briggs,† in Rundle's district. This district was exceedingly backward, so backward, indeed, that when the I.L.H., the first efficient mobile column ever allotted to the district, arrived upon the scene, Boers were tranquilly grazing their horses and gathering crops in the close neighbourhood of the garrison towns. From Bethlehem, as a centre, the I.L.H. systematically raided the surrounding farms. Though de Wet's attitude towards such raids was generally one of indifference, once, with startling suddenness, he struck back. Briggs had made a midnight descent on Reitz, and was returning with 27 prisoners. De Wet at his favourite headquarters, the farm Blijdschap, heard of the expedition, hastily gathered a few hundred burghers and attacked Briggs with fury, charging on horseback to point-blank range, in the new style. The I.L.H., not without much difficulty, fought their way back to Bethlehem.

The Free State.

In the south-west Colonel Rochfort succeeded to the command of Bruce Hamilton's columns, when that general was transferred to a brigade on the Natal border. But by that time the south-west had suffered such extensive devastation that it was possible at the end of September to reduce Rochfort's command. Colonels Byng and Dawkins were sent to the north-west to cover the establishment of a cordon of posts

The "area system" in the south-east, Oct.

* (1) At Anderkant, September 14; (2) at the confluence of the Vaal and the Wilge, September 22; (3) at Oploop, October 3, against Buys's commando of Transvaalers, driven across the Vaal by Rawlinson.

† Dartnell, who had been intended to command both wings of the I.L.H., was sent with the 2nd I.L.H. to the Zulu border to meet Botha's raid. He returned on November 3.

along the Vaal, and Colonel Damant to the north-east to aid Colonel Wilson and Kitchener's Fighting Scouts in guarding the work on the Heilbron-Frankfort line of blockhouses. At the same time the rest of Rochfort's columns, under Colonels W. H. Williams, Du Moulin, Bogle Smith and Lowry Cole, were transferred to that stormy corner of the south-east, where Kritzinger and Brand had been moving so long with impunity. Here, in conjunction with Knox's columns under Thorneycroft, Pilcher and Lord Basing, a plan of operations, similar to that employed by the S.A.C., was devised by Knox and put into practice. Under this "area system," each column had assigned to it a definite sphere of operations, with an intrenched camp for centre; the camps being so placed as to permit two or more columns rapidly to join hands for the purpose of breaking up a concentration. Tucker, from Bloemfontein, controlled the whole system. For methodical clearing work the plan proved successful. For catching the right sort of Boers it was slow.

Cape Colony, Sept.–Oct.

In the Cape Colony, Smuts, after his success at Modderfontein, pursued his way through the midlands, crossed the Port Elizabeth line on September 29, and doubled north to the Zuurberg. Ejected from this refuge he struck boldly to the south, with the object of joining hands with Scheepers.

Capture of Scheepers, Oct. 11.

On October 11, before the junction was effected, Scheepers himself, while lying ill in a farm at Koppies Kraal, six miles south of Blood River Station, was taken prisoner. For ten crowded weeks he had been roaming up and down the districts bordering the ocean, ceaselessly pursued by Beatson's four columns, under Kavanagh, Alexander, Crabbe and Atherton. Only once had he suffered any serious loss, and that on September 10, when Crabbe overwhelmed a detached party of thirty-seven, under Van der Merwe. Scheepers met the fate of Lotter. He was condemned by the military Court and executed on January 17.

Smuts and other leaders move to the west, end of Oct.

Two brothers named Pyper succeeded him and carried the commando to meet Smuts, with whom a junction was effected on October 16. Smuts, who had been harassed and damaged in many little skirmishes by Gorringe, Scobell and Doran, now determined to abandon the midlands and

break new ground in the west. Maritz, Smit and Theron had already inaugurated a mischievous campaign in this region, where, owing to the absence of railways, it was difficult for British columns to act with any success. Smuts now joined them, dashing across the Cape Town railway at Touws River Station on October 31, and plunging into the Ceres district. Van der Venter, leading a small detached commando, had preceded him by a week. When the month ended, therefore, the centre of hostilities in Cape Colony had been shifted to the west. A temporary calm reigned in the midlands, while in the north-east Myburg, Fouché and Wessels, periodically journeying to the Transkei territory for rest and refreshment, held their own with little difficulty.

Martial law at the Cape Ports, Oct. 6.

An event of the month was the extension of martial law to the Cape seaport towns.* The resistance hitherto offered by the civil government to this unpleasant but necessary step had been a source of much vexation to Kitchener. The ports certainly swarmed with Boer spies and partisans, but it would be a mistake to suppose that the rebel bands depended in any great degree on such extrinsic help. In the main they relied on their own wits and audacity, sustaining their stock of rifles, ammunition and horses by captures from their antagonists. In this connection it is impossible to pass over in silence the large number of surrenders by small parties of District Mounted Troops. A particularly bad instance occurred on October 15, when 157 men of the Somerset East D.M.T., who were holding a post at Doornbosch, surrendered, with scarcely a show of resistance, to Van der Venter.

Surrender at Somerset East, Oct. 15.

* At the same time a permanent board, representing the civil and military administrations, under the presidency of Mr. (now Sir Lewis) Michell, manager of the Standard Bank, was established at Cape Town to inquire into all grievances arising under the operation of martial law.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLOCKHOUSE SYSTEM

I

The system in Nov. 1901.

In November, 1901, the blockhouse system, though it had scarcely begun to affect the progress of the war, was in full course of development. To the fighting Boers it was still an object of ridicule rather than of fear; but the system, nevertheless, had taken its final shape, and only time, labour, and intelligent direction were needed to give it efficacy.

Map, p. 412.

Summary of its previous history. See pp. 256–261 and 324–326.

The genesis of the system has been described in previous chapters. It has been shown how it originated in the effort to strengthen the railways; how there crept in the additional purpose of converting the railways into barriers, and how, in July, both these ideas were transferred from the railway to the road, and the great conception formed of carving up the whole country into fenced areas of workable size. In Chapter XI. we showed that the first object to which the system was applied was the formation of a protected area around Pretoria and Johannesburg. In this chapter the system will be dealt with as a whole. We shall be forced, in so doing, to anticipate to some extent the narrative of the war; but to deal piecemeal with the history of construction would lead to still greater inconvenience, and would deny the reader important clues to the proper understanding of the campaign.

The standard blockhouse.

The circular iron blockhouse, with a garrison of seven men, had become universal. Factories were started, sooner or later, at the headquarters of nearly all the Royal Engineer companies, and although at many of these factories small modifications in the original design were made—in the roof,

for instance, which came to be umbrella-shaped instead of gable-shaped, in the form of loopholes and in other minor points—substantially, the design invented by Major Rice was in general use until the end of the war. In the work of manufacture all parts were standardised, so that they fitted together perfectly when the time came to assemble them, sometimes hundreds of miles from the workshop where they originated.

Rate and method of construction.

The rate of construction in the case of cross-country blockhouse lines depended mainly on the amount of transport available. Naturally it could never be so rapid as on the railways. Under average circumstances a party of four to six sappers, assisted by some infantry or natives, could complete a blockhouse, its ditch and wire entanglement, in six hours. Since it was rarely possible for more than three parties to be at work at the same time, three houses in the day was the usual rate of construction; though occasionally a rate of as many as six in the day was attained. The troops told off for construction were usually the battalions of infantry which were destined eventually to garrison the blockhouses, and the officer in command, acting with the advice of an R.E. officer, was responsible for laying out the line and selecting sites, duties which required considerable skill and judgment, especially in hilly country. A mobile column of all arms covered the operations.

Obstacles and alarms.

While a thousand yards, or thereabouts, was the usual interval between cross-country blockhouses, the rule was invariably followed that each must be in sight of its neighbour on either side. The wire fence spanning this interval always ran in the form of an obtuse angle, so that fire could be directed along it from both ends without risk to either blockhouse. In order to secure accurate fire in the dark, rests were provided for the correct alignment of rifles. Ordinary barbed wire was used at first, but the Boers became such adepts at cutting it that a quarter-inch unannealed steel wire, specially manufactured in England, had to be substituted. In Cape Colony, an eight-strand cable, manufactured in special "rope walks" established at Naauwpoort, was largely used. Not to be daunted, the Boers took to

uprooting the stays and levelling the fence bodily. The stays, accordingly, had to be anchored securely to heavy rocks sunk deep in the ground. As on the railways, alarms of all sorts were devised to give the garrisons notice of an attempt to tamper with the fence. A spring-gun would fire, dangling biscuit tins would rattle, a weight would drop in the blockhouse, and on any such signal the garrison would fire down the line of the fence. But, when all precautions were taken, it was impossible, on dark nights, to prevent determined bodies of Boers from passing the barrier. The passage could be made dangerous and difficult; that was all.

The protected area, Western Transvaal, Sept. 1901–Apr. 1902.

To pursue the history of construction. During September, October and November, the idea of taking Johannesburg as a centre and gradually reclaiming and enclosing areas on all sides of it was consistently worked out and actuated most of the blockhouse development. In the western district, another slice of territory was wrested from De la Rey by pushing the Mooi River line westward to the Schoon Spruit, where it passed through Klerksdorp, Ventersdorp and Tafel Kop, and by constructing at right angles to this cordon at first a line from Ventersdorp to the Mooi (October), and afterwards (January 1902), as a substitute, a line from Tafel Kop to the intrenched camp at Naauwpoort. Avoiding the Zwartruggens, which to the end remained De la Rey's main stronghold, the next line to be constructed ran northward from Naauwpoort to Olifant's Nek, while from Olifant's Nek to Pretoria the entire crest of the Magaliesberg was crowned with the little forts. Shooting out westward from the district thus enclosed, a line was begun in January 1902 from Buffelsvlei on the Schoon Spruit to Lichtenburg, and by April this line had been linked up to Mafeking.

Eastern Transvaal, Sept.–Nov. 1901.

East of Johannesburg, as we saw in the last chapter, the cordon of Constabulary posts was transferred in September to the Wilge River. In November the posts were carried still further east, touching Brugspruit on the Delagoa Railway and Waterval on the Natal Railway, with an extension to the Vaal at Villiersdorp. Louis Botha's sphere was thus considerably contracted. Although there was never any continuous line of blockhouses along the Vaal itself, all

the drifts from Coalmine Drift on the west to Villiersdorp on the east were permanently held by detachments of the Railway Pioneer Regiment under Colonel Capper.*

Free State, Oct.–Jan.

On the south the protected area extended into the adjoining territories of the Free State. In October and November 1901 the original line from Potchefstroom to Kopjes Station was dismantled and a fresh one constructed along the Rhenoster River to the Vaal, with an extension due south to the Lace Diamond Mine and so to Kroonstad. In correspondence with this change the Constabulary posts on the line of the Modder were pushed northwards to the line Boshof-Bultfontein, so that Badenhorst's hunting-grounds in the north-west of the Free State were contracted both from the south and north. By the end of January 1902, the blockhouse line having been carried southward to the Valsch and the Constabulary posts northward to the Vet, his freedom of action was still further hampered. In the North-eastern Free State an important line was thrown out during September and October 1901 from Heilbron to Frankfort; Heilbron itself being already connected with the trunk railway by a blockhoused branch from Wolvehoek.

The protected area at the end of November 1901.

At the end of November, therefore, the protected area of which Johannesburg (or, more correctly, Vereeniging) was the centre, was outlined by the following points:—Olifant's Nek, Pretoria, Brugspruit, Waterval (Natal Railway), Villiersdorp, Frankfort, Heilbron, Wolvehoek, Kroonstad, Coalmine Drift, Klerksdorp and Ventersdorp; an area, roughly, 120 miles by 160. It is not to be inferred that the whole of this region was absolutely secure. Its fringe, at every point, was liable to constant irruptions. In the south-eastern corner the best wards of the Heidelberg commando held a scarcely disputed sway between the Vaal and the Natal Railway, while the deep, re-entering angles on either side of the Wolvehoek-Frankfort line were yet to be the scene of many drives.

Other lines of blockhouses, unconnected with this central scheme, made rapid progress. In Chapter XII. we alluded

* There was one genuine line of blockhouses on the Vaal, namely, from Coalmine Drift to Commando Drift, finished in March, 1902.

Other lines in the Eastern Transvaal, Oct. 1901–Apr. 1902.

to the hurried construction of a line from Wakkerstroom to Piet Retief, the immediate object of which was to block Botha's line of retreat from Natal. This line was finished in October. Parallel to it, fifty miles further to the north, a very important line was begun in December, and completed in February 1902. Running from Standerton through Ermelo and Carolina to Wonderfontein, it had the effect of cutting in half that intractable region, the high veld. The line proved of great value, not so much as a barrier, as a channel of communication; for, by means of fortified depôts at Ermelo and Carolina, the British obtained a permanent lodgment in the heart of Botha's country. Taken with the Brugspruit-Waterval cordon of posts on the west and the Wakkerstroom blockhouse line on the south, it completed the sub-division of the Eastern Transvaal into four nearly equal parts. In April, 1902, by the addition of a line from Ermelo due east to the Swazi border, the sub-division became fivefold.

North-eastern Transvaal.

In the North-eastern Transvaal no attempt was made to carve up areas. Only one line of blockhouses was ever undertaken, that along the road from Machadodorp to Lydenburg, whither convoys, hitherto perpetually molested by Viljoen's bands, could travel henceforth in safety. Examples of protected roads in other districts were those from Kaap Muiden to Barberton and from Dundee to Vryheid.

North-eastern Free State, Dec. 1901 Feb. 1902.

While in the Transvaal the cross-country lines, roughly speaking, ran parallel from north to south, and were linked up by railways running east and west, in the Free State, owing to the direction of the railway, the process was reversed. Of the lines unconnected with the central system already described, two were of eminent importance. These ran through de Wet's own district, the formidable North-east. One was a direct continuation of the Heilbron-Frankfort line and ran east through Vrede to the Drakensberg. The other was a continuation of the Coalmine Drift-Kroonstad line, and ran through Lindley, Bethlehem and Harrismith to the Drakensberg. Both were begun in December 1901, and finished early in February 1902. Coupled together by the trunk railway on the west and by posts

guarding the Drakensberg passes on the east, these lines were to become the framework of the great driving mechanism which was to be put into operation early in 1902. Further to the south, the old cordon of Constabulary posts between Bloemfontein and the Basuto border was gradually replaced from December onwards by a blockhouse line terminating near Maseru, and by the end of January was linked up to its neighbour on the north by a connection from Bethlehem, through the Brandwater basin, to Ficksburg. In the extreme south, the Orange River, from Bethulie to the Basuto border, was blockhoused more and more thoroughly as time went on.

Cape Colony, Dec. 1901–May 1902.

In Cape Colony the tracing of the railways was such that in the midland and eastern districts they served very well to divide the country into areas of suitable shape and size, without the need of cross-country lines. In the west it was otherwise. Owing to the absence of lines of supply, a great part of the vast district lying between the Cape Town-De Aar Railway and the Atlantic coast was practically inaccessible. In December 1901, accordingly, Kitchener initiated the gigantic task of bridging the desert (for such in a military sense it was) by a line of blockhouses stretching from Victoria Road to Lambert's Bay, a distance of more than three hundred miles. The transport difficulties were enormous and the rate of progress proportionately slow. The easternmost and easiest section was completed in the last week of January 1901; but the whole line was not finished till the last day of May, just when peace was declared. It cannot be said to have had any results commensurate with the labour and expense devoted to it.

The Cuban parallel.

Among the many interesting historical parallels to the blockhouse system in South Africa, the most recent and instructive is that afforded by the Spanish operations in Cuba. Here an island 800 miles by 80 was literally sown with blockhouses. The backbone of the system was a great *trocha*, or clearing, which ran, without any regard to topography or roads, straight across the island. Along the *trocha* the bush was cut down for some hundreds of yards and a continuous barbed-wire fence constructed, along which sentries were posted. Forty yards behind ran a series of log-houses

which served as quarters to the troops and, to a limited extent, as defensive works. They were of three different sizes; the largest half-a-mile apart, smaller ones every quarter of a mile and smaller ones still, built of mud and planks and capable of holding five men, at intervals of about 150 yards. As in South Africa, all alike were encircled with ditches, and, as in South Africa, alarms were arranged to give notice of an attempt to tamper with the fence. Such was the *trocha;* and in addition to the *trocha* the whole island was covered with little blockhouses, loopholed and bullet-proof, crowning every eminence and commanding every valley, some running in circles, some in straight lines and some in zig-zags.

Kitchener's use of the blockhouse system.

With all this, and with the additional measure of devastating great tracts of country and collecting the inhabitants in concentration camps, the Cuban insurrection was not quelled. If we compare Weyler's methods with those of Kitchener, the reason for this failure is apparent. Weyler used his blockhouse system as an end in itself, not, as it should have been used, to supplement active operations. Small bands of Spanish troops used to sally out in the morning, beat the country in a perfunctory fashion and return in the evening. There was no energetic raiding, no systematic driving, with the result that outside rifle-range of the blockhouses the rebels were masters of the country. Kitchener fell into no such error as this. His policy from the first was to aid his field army, not to provide a substitute for it. It is true that the mode of rendering aid was circuitous. Since every blockhouse line required a column to cover the work of construction, it is obvious that a great quantity of mobile troops was temporarily diverted from active work and relegated to passive work. It is true, also, that the multiplication of passive lines of defence led the army still further away from the ideal path of tactical development and finally exalted the mechanical theory of operations into a rigid creed. Exaggerated hopes were built on the efficacy of the lines as barriers to determined men, hopes which left out of account the tactical vigour of the enemy. Retaining unimpaired their superiority in this

quality, the Boers, for a long time to come, viewed with disdain the eruption of tiny forts. It was only by degrees that they awoke to the realisation that they were taken like flies in a spider's web. If the meshes could be torn at any given point by a sufficiently strong effort, the throttling effect of the web as a whole increased notwithstanding. Communication between commandos became more and more difficult; concentrations on a large scale impossible. Conversely, every new blockhouse became an additional centre of British intelligence and every completed blockhouse line an additional artery of safe communication, feeding depôts far afield in areas hitherto barely accessible. Finally, by a revolution in the handling of the field army, a way was found of scouring and ransacking those areas more drastically and systematically than ever before had been possible. Though they struggled tooth and nail to escape from the toils, though they countered the new methods with bold originality and undiminished pluck, there stole over the Boers a sense of impotence and exhaustion. Turn where they would, argue as they might, they felt the irresistible pressure of a conquering will.

A transition period, Nov. 1901–Jan. 1902.

The period which we shall next deal with, from November 1901 to January 1902, is a period of transition. The blockhouse system, though by no means complete, was making rapid progress; but no corresponding progress was made in the handling of the field army. Several innovations were introduced into the standard pattern of drive, but no substantial improvements. The problem, indeed, had not been thought out. On the other hand, thanks to the permanent foothold gained, through the agency of blockhouse lines, in the midst of the Eastern Transvaal, the night-raiding tactics, in every respect the diametrical opposite of the driving tactics, received a great stimulus.

Other topics connected with the situation in November 1901.

Before resuming the history of active operations, we propose to deal with some other important topics, belonging naturally to the present stage of the narrative. All come under the general head, either of civil measures, or of military reinforcements.

II

Civil Measures and Reinforcements

Civil reconstruction during the last year of the war.

The ramifications of the blockhouse system and the slow formation of protected areas were not the only signs that the day of conquest was approaching. Within these areas, under the able and energetic administrations of Lord Milner, who returned to South Africa in August, and, in the Orange River Colony, of the Deputy-Administrator, Sir H. Goold-Adams, marked progress was beginning to be made in the establishment of civil industry and in administrative reconstruction. Practical farming, it is true, languished; for the areas quitted by the enemy were for the most part deserts, but the mining industry was resumed. Whereas in May 1901 only 150 stamps had been at work and only 7,439 ounces of gold had been won, in December nearly 1,000 stamps were at work and the output of gold was 52,827 ounces. During the following five months these figures were to rise respectively to 2,065 and 138,600. By December, 3,000 British refugees had returned to Johannesburg and, by the end of May 1902, 30,000, or nearly half the original British population of the Transvaal, had returned to their homes. The civil departments of law, finance, education, railways, mines, agriculture and native affairs were firmly and efficiently organised in both colonies and handled an increasing volume of work. In the meantime, with his eyes fixed on the difficult situation which would arise at the end of the war, Lord Milner began to grapple in advance with the problems of land settlement and repatriation.

Deportation stopped, Dec. 1901.

With regard to the Boer non-combatant population, an important modification of policy was initiated in December. Orders were issued to all columns that no more families, save those in actual danger of starvation and those belonging to a privileged class, to which we shall shortly allude, were to be brought into the concentration camps. Since most of the accessible farms had already been emptied, the order applied mainly to the women and children who had preferred, in

defiance of hardship, to accompany the commandos and who lived in nomadic laagers. The Boers, however much they had railed in the past against the inhumanity of the camps, were soon to realise and admit the essential humanity of the concentration system. The embarrassment and anxiety caused by the helpless non-combatants in their midst was to grow day by day. Finally, at the Vereeniging Conference, the truth received frank and undisguised expression. "To-day," said Botha, "we are only too glad to know that our women and children are under British protection." The wretchedness of those who remained on the veld became, indeed, a powerful argument for submission.

Reinforcements, June 1901–June 1902.

In the meantime steady efforts were made to keep the army at full fighting strength and to prosecute the war with undiminished vigour. Two cavalry regiments, the 2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays) and the 3rd (King's Own) Hussars arrived in South Africa in the first week of December, and the 7th Hussars a little later, bringing the total strength of the cavalry up to 16,000. Since May the Mounted Infantry had risen from 12,000 to 14,000 and were still to rise to 15,000. The South African Constabulary, which had been 7,800 strong in June, was 9,500 strong at the end of the war. A constant stream of reinforcements continued to flow from the over-sea colonies. Between May 1901 and June 1902 no less than 11,000 officers and men came from this source; 4,600 from New Zealand, 3,400 from Australia and Tasmania, and 3,000 from Canada. In this last instance the stream of recruits was a new one; for a year elapsed between the return of Canada's first contingents and the despatch, in January 1902, of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, 900 strong.* To the Royal Artillery Mounted Rifles we have already made a brief allusion. First organised in December 1901, they took the field in January 1902 and reached a strength of 2,300 in March of that year. Lastly, in September, the first efforts had been made in England to raise a third contingent of Imperial Yeomanry.

* The check was due to political difficulties into which it is needless to enter. It was largely by the exertions of Major Merritt, of Toronto, that these difficulties were overcome and the new corps organised.

It was proposed at first to limit enlistment to men who had already served in the old Yeomanry, the C.I.V. and the Colonial forces. The results were scanty. One complete battalion (the 25th) embarked on November 30, but the 26th was not ready till February 8 and even then was under strength. Both together numbered 900 officers and men. Meanwhile it had been decided to open the door to all comers. Within three weeks of December 19, when the order was issued, 7,000 officers and men were accepted. They were trained in England and for the most part sailed for South Africa in May 1902, too late, like several of the colonial contingents, to affect the course of the war, but destined to be of considerable value during the succeeding months.

The National Scouts.

It remains to consider an accession of strength from a strangely different quarter. Allusion was made in Chapter X. to the widespread use made of surrendered Boers, to some extent for defensive duties, but principally in the capacity of intelligence agents and scouts, and it was pointed out that at that period the services so rendered had no formal character, and did not denote in any sense a cleavage in Boer sentiment. The same remark applies to certain small bands formed of the lower class of Boer which obtained a sort of informal recognition as "privateer" corps, and whose *raison d'être* was loot. But in September 1901, after, and in consequence of, the failure of the proclamation of August, a movement of a new character was initiated. For more than a year past there had been living under British protection a number of influential Boers who had taken the oath of allegiance, and who viewed the guerilla war as wanton and ruinous folly. It was from among these men that the Burgher Peace Committee had been formed in December 1900. When, in February 1901, the work of that Committee had ended in total failure, they kept silence for several months; but in September, when the proclamation had ended in equally complete failure, they offered to fight on the British side and to raise levies from among their surrendered countrymen for the same purpose. Kitchener fell in readily with the proposal, and arrangements were made at once for the organisation of the "National Scouts" in the Transvaal and, at a

See pp. 321 and 331.

later date, of the "Orange River Colony Volunteers" in the sister colony. The latter body, however, needs but little notice.

Organisation.

The National Scouts, while they were placed under direct British control, were raised mainly through the agency of Generals Andries Cronje and Celliers, two Boers of the old school who had fought sturdily in their day, but who, from their position within the British lines, were able to realise the hopelessness of resistance, and who had no sympathy with the spirit which now prolonged the struggle. The Scouts were organised territorially in "wings," varying in size from 150 to 50, with one or two British officers at the head of each wing and beneath them Boer officers. Each burgher signed a certificate of engagement binding him to serve his Majesty in arms for a period of six months. For a time the payment given took the objectionable form of loot-money, supplemented by presents from headquarters for specially meritorious services. At the end of the year, however, loot-money was abolished and a regular scale of pay, beginning at five shillings a day for the rank and file and rising to fifteen shillings a day for commandants, was substituted. Presents, though not explicitly promised, were in point of fact often given, and when given were divided *pro rata* according to the respective ranks. Pay and presents were not the only inducements offered. Unofficially, it was put before every burgher that at the end of the war he would obtain certain preferential advantages in the settlement of the land. To the officers the hopes held out were necessarily more shadowy; but all were led to believe that they would hold in one way or another a privileged position. Thus the military movement obtained a semi-political character. By securing the formal co-operation of Boers in the work of ending the war, a wedge was to be driven into the Boer nationality and a nucleus formed of men definitely compromised with the Dutch interest and definitely attached to the British interest. Every opportunity was taken of emphasizing the distinction between converts and irreconcilables. In the concentration-camps, which were the principal recruiting-grounds for the burgher levies, separate sections were allotted to the families

of National Scouts, and when the order went forth that no more families were to be brought in from the veld, those of Scouts were made exceptions to the rule and were allowed, in addition, to bring in their cattle.

Strength of the Scouts.

The burgher leaders found their undertaking more difficult than they had expected. It was not till the end of the year that the Scouts made any marked progress. In February 1902 there were 1,000, and at the end of the war 1,480. The O.R.C. Volunteers never reached a greater strength than 480. While the burgher levies showed zeal and unvarying loyalty under their new masters, they derived little military value from their organisation as regular military units. As their origin would suggest, they never turned the issue of a fight in the open field and never practised those distinctively Boer tactics which made the commandos formidable. It was in raiding and scouting that their chief military value lay. Their moral effect upon the fighting men is not easy to gauge. In the case of a stubborn nation such an example operates in two ways. For every man it attracts, it embitters and hardens several others. Defection, common as it had been, had always caused profound resentment among the faithful. Clothed with official British recognition and official British rewards, it aroused no less bitter contempt among those who upheld the national spirit in its integrity and refused to admit any other conception of duty. With a few unimportant exceptions, the fighting chiefs of the guerilla war maintained a solid front and carried with them the majority of the rank and file. Nevertheless, as the miseries and hardships of war became more acute, and as the local propaganda of the burgher levies gradually gained currency among the commandos in the field, the number of men who dropped out of the ranks tended to increase. Only a few joined the Scouts; most preferred captivity; but, whatever the motives at work, there finally took shape in the minds of the fighting leaders an apprehension that if they did not come to terms while there was still time surrenders might become wholesale. This apprehension had an appreciable effect in bringing the war to an end.

Military and moral value.

Comments.

Useful as a military expedient, the raising of the National

Scouts produced no lasting political effect. Such a policy can rarely be carried to its logical end, and if it is not carried to its logical end, the conqueror becomes involved in inconsistency and the seceders, with whom for the time being he allies himself, in disappointment. The compact made between the National Scouts and the British was no exception to the rule. Theoretically, it was a perfectly legitimate compact. The two Republics had long ago been formally annexed and, within a limited sphere, a regular system of government had been established. Technically, every well-disposed Boer was bound in duty to help in restoring order under the new *régime* and, technically, the new *régime* was bound to encourage him in that endeavour. Technically, moreover, under the proclamation of August 7, which was never abrogated, every Boer who had not surrendered by September 15 was condemned either to perpetual exile or to a forfeiture of lands. If a rooted resolve had existed to stand by these technicalities and convert them into facts the position of the Scouts might have been strong. But every step in retreat from the full severity of the proclamation meant a corresponding deterioration in the status of the Scouts. To fulfil all the shadowy obligations incurred towards these men involved more than either party to the compact was disposed to realise. It involved a united determination on the part both of the military and civil authorities to adhere, if not to the letter, at any rate to the spirit of the proclamation, to refuse negotiation with the proscribed leaders, and, in a word, to secure a peace which should leave the Scouts in the right and the fighting men in the wrong. Whether in the last resort these aims were practicable or not is a matter for later discussion. The point to notice here is that no such united determination existed. The position was strangely paradoxical. Kitchener, who was primarily responsible for the raising of the Scouts, and who had raised them on the technical basis created by the proclamation, did not hold with any approach to consistency the policy which alone could invest them at a future date with influence and esteem. Bent on ending the war by every legitimate means within his reach, he snatched in perfectly

good faith at the military expedient offered him, with too little concern for the political consequences. Milner, who had nothing to do in the first instance with the raising of the Scouts, did hold with absolute consistency the policy which alone could justify that step. But, although he gave the movement, once initiated, all the support in his power, he never based great hopes upon it, and realised the unenviable task it might involve for him. Coming into existence amid all these ambiguities, the Scouts, therefore, held a position which from the first was precarious.

Sir Ian Hamilton joins Kitchener's staff, Dec. 1901.

Before closing this chapter it is necessary to record a noteworthy accession to the *personnel* of the higher command. At the beginning of December, Lieut.-General Sir Ian Hamilton, who, since his departure from South Africa at the end of the year 1900, had been Military Secretary to Lord Roberts, returned to the seat of war in the capacity of Chief of Staff to Lord Kitchener. The step thus taken was well inspired and had good results. It is true that the designation "Chief of Staff," was in some respects a misnomer. In describing Kitchener's system in Chapter X. we pointed out that there was no room for a genuine Chief of Staff, or a genuine Second in Command, in so far as those terms convey a real devolution of responsibility. Kitchener was, and remained, absolute master in all things. Nor were the fundamental characteristics of the Headquarters Staff altered. It was, and it remained, a machine—as far as it went, a highly efficient machine—for the faithful and exact execution of the will of the Commander-in-Chief. At the same time there was ample room for the informal introduction of a fresh element such as that represented by Sir Ian Hamilton's buoyant and vigorous personality. Kitchener had been growing to recognise not only that the strain entailed on himself by such an immense burden of centralised work was excessive, but that he was tending to lose touch with local administration and field operations. It was, therefore, with his hearty welcome and approbation, that Sir Ian Hamilton came to Pretoria. Retaining undiminished authority in all essential matters, Kitchener was able to transfer to the newcomer a considerable quantity of work. As soon as he

See page 274.

arrived Hamilton formally took over the daily interviewing of the various heads of departments. Beyond this his functions were never expressly defined, but depended mainly on his own tact and good sense. By the exercise of both these qualities he was able, without friction, to secure a useful and responsible place in the administrative system. This result was creditable, not only to himself, but to the Headquarters Staff, a fraternity united by the closest ties of mutual loyalty and operating a "going concern" in whose efficiency they firmly believed. Kitchener found himself able to quit Pretoria with a freer conscience than before and to make longer and more frequent visits to distant garrisons and districts, with great advantage both to his own health and spirits and to the efficiency of the army. Conversely, at a very critical moment, four months later, Hamilton was able to take a high command in the field which no other officer then in South Africa was equally competent to fill.

Insufficient touch between South Africa and England.

He was also useful in constituting a closer link between the army in South Africa and the Government at home. The necessity for such a link undoubtedly existed. Among the general public great ignorance reigned as to the progress of the war, the reasons which prolonged it, the methods by which it was conducted and the chances of a settlement. Kitchener's published dispatches were of a rigorously official character; accurate and exhaustive records of a vast mass of unrelated facts, but otherwise unilluminating. Such documents, it is true, must always be incomplete. We think that these might, with great advantage, have been rendered more informing. Nevertheless public perplexity would have been comparatively immaterial, had thorough information been possessed by the Government. But apart from political or semi-political matters in which the co-operation of the Government was directly needed, Lord Roberts and the War Office had insufficient information. Kitchener, on his side, had no broad ground of complaint. Substantially, the fundamental principle that the civil power should give the most generous latitude to the Commander-in-Chief in the field was maintained. There were instances of friction, but only on points of detail, and such friction as there was

arose, it would seem, at least as much from Kitchener's reserve as from any disposition on the part of the War Office towards undue interference. This reserve was not calculated. Its explanation was simple, namely, that Kitchener was not a good correspondent. He was a man of action, supremely self-reliant, voracious of work and immersed in work, with neither the inclination nor the time nor the aptitude for overflowing on paper. He wrote regularly, but as regards strictly military topics, not fully. One result of this absence of close touch between South Africa and the home authorities was an ever-present doubt in the minds of the latter as to the policy to be adopted in the final settlement. To the different views held by Kitchener and Milner we have alluded. The final decision rested with the Government, but only an intimate familiarity with the conditions of the war and the temper of the Boers could help them to this decision.

CHAPTER XV

DE WET'S LAST CAMPAIGN

(November, 1901–January, 1902.)

I

The Situation in November 1901

The three centres of resistance, Nov. onwards.

THE offensive taken by the Boers in the spring of 1901 may be said to have ended at Bakenlaagte on the 30th of October. There followed a comparatively uneventful month, during which Kitchener quietly remedied the dislocation to the military forces caused by Botha's diversion against Natal and at the same time resumed the offensive with 30,000 men, distributed over twenty-six columns, in two contiguous districts, the North-eastern Free State, and the high veld of the Eastern Transvaal. These two districts, the one under the personal control of Christiaan de Wet, the other under the personal control of Louis Botha, together with a third district, the Western Transvaal, formed henceforth the principal centres of Boer resistance. In concentrating upon Botha and de Wet, Kitchener was not under-valuing De la Rey, whose district was more intractable and less accessible than the other two. The Western Transvaal, indeed, presented elements of peculiar danger. Its chief was the ablest guerilla leader now in the field, and, although his full powers were not yet known, events during the last year had shown that within his borders unsupported columns ran heavy risks. On the other hand, De la Rey was isolated. Between his commandos and those of Botha and de Wet lay the large "protected" area which was described in the last chapter. Now that so much of his country as directly

threatened the Pretoria-Johannesburg district was wrested from him and fenced in, Kitchener decided to disregard him and to throw the bulk of his forces against Botha and de Wet.

Secondary fields of disturbance.

Secondary fields of disturbance were the North-western Free State, a district now being rapidly curtailed by the construction of blockhouse lines and constabulary posts; the South-eastern Free State, where the "area" system was making slow progress; the extreme Northern Transvaal under Beyers, the North-eastern Transvaal under Viljoen, and the mountainous regions bordering the Natal-Transvaal frontier, where Plumer, Pulteney and Stewart were still operating. Cape Colony remained, as ever, the running sore, periodically threatening grave complications, periodically relapsing into apparent calm, and always devouring troops. At present there was a lull; for Scheepers and Lotter had been disposed of, Kritzinger was over the Free State border, Smuts had plunged into the pathless west and the Midlands were almost clear.

Kitchener's different methods.

The methods now to be adopted in the two districts upon which Kitchener directed his main efforts were of a widely different character. The operations against Louis Botha consisted mainly of systematized night raids, which will be described in the next chapter. In this chapter we shall deal with the operations in the North-eastern Free State, which for the most part took the old form of drives, enlivened and complicated by the reappearance of de Wet as an active leader in the field.

II

De Wet takes the Field

Plans for the concentric drive on Paardehoek.

In the first week of November fourteen columns were ready to take the field in the north-east of the Free State. Of Elliot's group, Bethune's column, now commanded by Lowe, had returned from Zululand and had joined Broadwood at Harrismith, while De Lisle, after his forced march to Bakenlaagte, regained Standerton on November 4. Here he met Rimington, who had also been recalled from the

Map p. 446.

Transvaal after the unsuccessful flank-march upon Botha. Dartnell, with the 2nd I.L.H., after his six weeks' absence in Zululand, returned to Rundle's district on November 3 and took post at Harrismith. The sister regiment of I.L.H., under Colonel Briggs, was at Bethlehem; a force under Colonel Reay * was at Eland's River Bridge, and Spens, with the column which he had led in the Natal campaign, was encamped near Botha's Pass. To the north of the area of operations, in addition to Rimington and De Lisle, Major Damant's column was at Frankfort, and Colonels Byng and Wilson (the former with a column of Australians and Yeomanry, the latter with Kitchener's Fighting Scouts) were at Heilbron. Finally, in the south-western corner of the area, three small columns under Colonels J. S. Barker, W. H. Williams and Major Holmes, with the first-named officer in command, had been concentrated at Winburg. The map will show that these fourteen columns stood round a parallelogram whose diagonal is 175 miles and the least of whose sides is 100 miles in length; the four corners being Winburg, Heilbron, Standerton and Harrismith. Kitchener's scheme was as follows:—At dawn on November 6 all the fourteen columns were to march concentrically into the parallelogram. The Winburg force, the most distant of all from the centre, having gained the line Lindley-Bethlehem in six marches, was to block all egress to the south-west. A similar function on the south was allotted to Rundle, who, with Reay's troops and anything else he could get together, was to guard the road between Bethlehem and Eland's River Bridge. Meanwhile all the other columns were to converge on the sixth day upon Paardehoek, an isolated group of hills about 25 miles south of Frankfort. Here it was hoped that all the commandos within the cordon would be swept together and entrapped.

Novelties in the scheme.

In some respects the arrangements made for this great concentric movement were more perfect than any hitherto devised. In the first place, extraordinary precautions were taken to ensure secrecy. Only at the last moment were secret instructions sent out to the various column-com-

* 2nd Manchester Regt., 62nd Co. I.Y., Manchester M.I., two guns.

manders. Generally speaking, among the 15,000 officers and men who composed the united force, profound ignorance as to the object aimed at reigned until the march actually had begun. In the second place, efforts were made to deceive the Boers as to the line of march of the various units. In the instructions to column-commanders two main points were insisted on, inter-communication on the third day and punctual arrival at the rendezvous on the sixth day. Otherwise they were allowed a tolerably free hand and were expressly urged to make circuitous and misleading marches. In order to leave an apparent gap in the cordon, Damant, who, from his post at Frankfort, had the least distance of all to cover, was ordered to remain immobile until the fourth day of the operations. The drive, however, suffered from the radical defect of all its predecessors. The columns, that is to say, could not cover the ground, partly from its vast extent, partly from their inability to move on sufficiently wide fronts. This was the case even by day; at night, the time habitually chosen by the Boers to make their escape from drives, there were wide, unguarded gaps between the bivouacs, and no attempt was made to link up outposts. In this drive the problem was simplified as the circle diminished; but nothing approaching close touch was attained until the last day, nor were the real strongholds—groups of steep and intricate hills, such as the Witkopjes—seriously affected at all. The movement stood or fell by the completeness of the enveloping cordon. If this essential was unfulfilled secrecy and stratagem were of no avail.

The drive.

The punctuality and smoothness with which the machinery worked were all that could be desired. There were no hitches, and, indeed, no incidents of any kind. On the 12th the circle of columns duly converged on Paardehoek and found nothing whatever within the trap. The Boer intelligence and mobility had been equal to the occasion. No sooner had the movement begun than the heliograph flashed the news from hill to hill, the small scattered laagers took alarm and dribbled through the wide gaps in the cordon or hid in difficult fastnesses such as the deep-cut ravines of the Wilge and Liebenberg's Vlei. On the 14th, in marching

back to Heilbron, Byng and Wilson were attacked, without success, by a small commando and this was the only action of any consequence. In small skirmishes round the circle 34 Boers were killed or wounded and 86 prisoners were taken; 10,000 cattle were captured, and 200 wagons.

Such operations caused little disturbance to the Boer leaders, military or civil. On the 13th, at de Wet's old haunt, the farm Blijdschap, about midway between Lindley and Reitz, and just outside the track of Briggs's column, there occurred an important meeting between the Free State leader and his President. Ever since his hair-breadth escape in July, Steyn, with his new Executive Council and a body-guard under van Niekerk of Ficksburg, had been wandering about the north-east, frequently dogged by the independent columns of Rimington and Briggs, who had received particular instructions to hunt and catch the President and de Wet. But the Reitz incident had made the Government party very cautious. They rarely slept in the same place on two successive nights, their horses were saddled up regularly at 2 A.M. and the President himself never slept in a house. At the end of October the party had travelled south to the Clocolan district and had met Kritzinger. It was on their return to the plains around Lindley and Reitz, where they were now to remain for a long time, that the President heard from de Wet that a letter had arrived from the Transvaal Government. This letter, which the two men now considered, had been written on the morrow of Botha's success at Bakenlaagte. With the idea, perhaps, that that was a favourable moment, Botha and his colleagues suggested the opening of overtures for peace, on the basis of the independence of the Boer Republics. While the proposal may have been serious, it is also possible that the letter was prompted by de Wet's tame behaviour in September and was meant as a strong hint that it was time to be up and doing. With the exception of the chance affair at Graspan in June, and the unpremeditated brush with Briggs and the I.L.H. in October, de Wet had not headed a field force since his flight from the Cape Colony in February. During the winter months this inaction was the result of

De Wet meets Steyn at Blijdschap, Nov. 13.

(See p. 301.)

(See pp. 288 and 393.)

express concert with the Transvaal, but he had prolonged it into the spring and had not stirred a foot to support Botha's fine raid on Natal. Stung by the Transvaal letter, to which Steyn at once returned a characteristically fiery reply, de Wet now decided to take the field with a "flying" commando of 700 picked men drawn from the burghers of the north-east. This force, which de Wet intended to strengthen from time to time with locally-collected burghers, was composed of detachments from the Bethlehem district, under General Michal Prinsloo and Commandants Olivier and Rautenbach; from the Heilbron sub-district, under Commandant David van Coller, who had recently succeeded Steenekamp; from the Kroonstad sub-district, under Commandant Jan Celliers; and from the Vrede and Ladybrand sub-districts, under Commandants Manie Botha and Koen. There was also a detachment of Transvaalers, under Mears of Heidelberg. During the latter half of November the force was gradually concentrated at Blijdschap. A general Council of War was called for the 28th, and for the purpose of attending this council, Hattingh, Acting-Head-Commandant of the Kroonstad district, and Wessel Wessels, Acting-Head-Commandant of the Vrede district, also joined the gathering at Blijdschap.

De Wet decides to take the field.

Concentrates at Blijdschap, and orders a Council of War for Nov. 28.

The concentration was just complete when news reached de Wet of the approach of British columns. They were those of Elliot, who after the Paardehoek movement had brought his columns to Harrismith and, leaving that town on the 19th, had begun to sweep north-westward by Bethlehem and Lindley to Kroonstad. Dartnell, Briggs and Reay covered his left flank by operating south of the main road until he had reached Bethlehem. Between Lindley and Kroonstad the triple Winburg force had been intended to fulfil the same function; but, owing to some confusion in the arrangements, started much too late. Kitchener had also meant Rimington, Damant and Wilson to descend southward from Heilbron and Frankfort so as to operate on Elliot's right; but, owing to another misadventure, this co-operation also came too late. It was, indeed, scarcely needed; for Elliot's columns, several thousand strong,

Elliot's columns pass close to the gathering.

passed close to Blijdschap and heard nothing of the Boer gathering.

Rimington's failure to co-operate needs some explanation. Immediately after the Paardehoek movement he and Damant had been sent to the Vaal in pursuit of the Boer force which had attacked Byng and Wilson. Between the 15th and the 26th Rimington and Damant did some excellent work, neutralised, unhappily, by the weakness of the detachments of the Railway Pioneer Regiment which were holding the drifts on the Vaal. One of these posts, 50 strong, near Villiersdorp, was captured by the Boers on the 20th, and another would have suffered the same fate but for the prompt action of the columns. Though the commando escaped across the Vaal, Rimington had the satisfaction of capturing Commandant Buys of Heidelberg. On the 23rd the two leaders, who were better employed in this sort of work than in mechanical operations of huge scope, worked out a little combination which produced 17 prisoners. But meanwhile the columns were once more wanted by Kitchener for his latest drive. Rimington, who had a profound distrust of big drives, in the manner that they were then conducted, was an adept in turning the blind eye to signals and now succeeded in losing himself for several days. It was only on the 26th that he rose to the surface, so to speak, and was recalled to Frankfort. Marching with a great show of speed, though the drive was already over, he passed through Frankfort and camped at midday on the 27th at Krom Spruit, a few miles west of the town. Here important news reached him. A captured burgher of the Vrede commando volunteered the information that a Council of War had been convened by de Wet and was to meet on the following day, the 28th. The place of meeting given was Spytfontein, which is five miles to the west of Blijdschap. Apart from this slight error, the information was accurate, but incomplete; for Rimington did not gather from it that not only a Council of War, but a concentration in force, was afoot.

Rimington hears of the Council of War, Nov. 27.

Having no fresh orders from headquarters, Rimington resolved to march at once to Spytfontein, which is forty miles south of Krom Spruit. Beside summoning Wilson,

And marches south, Nov. 28.

who was near Heilbron, to join him at Jagersrust with the K.F.S., he wired to Pretoria a proposal to send all the troops within reach towards the scene of the Krygsraad. At 7 P.M. on the 28th, without waiting for the answer, Rimington started; at dawn on the 29th he was at Jagersrust, where he found Wilson awaiting him, and at nightfall the two columns started for Spytfontein. Rimington took 1,070 mounted men of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons and 3rd New South Wales M.R., a company of the 2nd Black Watch, two guns of "J" Battery, two guns of the 74th Battery and a pom-pom. Wilson contributed 400 mounted men, two companies of the 2nd West Kents and two guns. The two convoys, with an escort of 250 mounted men and 300 infantry, under Major Bennett of the N.S.W.M.R., moved slowly, while the fighting force, consisting wholly of mounted men and artillery, pushed rapidly forward. At dawn on the 30th they reached Spytfontein, sighted 50 Boers, and pursued them towards Blijdschap without success. At 9.30, the force having off-saddled for a rest, news reached Rimington that the convoy, now seven miles behind, was being attacked. De Wet's scouts, in fact, had informed him of Bennett's approach and he had resolved to attack the convoy. With detachments of the Kroonstad, Bethlehem and Vrede commandos, under Hattingh, Prinsloo and Manie Botha, about 500 men in all, he assaulted Bennett vigorously on three sides. A hot little fight raged round a commanding hill on the left, where Hattingh was charged by a troop of the Inniskillings, under Lieutenant Oliver. Oliver was killed and the troop driven off, but a squadron of New South Wales M.R. made an equally spirited attack and retook the hill. At this point, Rimington and the main body came up and easily dispersed the Boer force. Soon afterwards a thunderstorm came on, with persistent torrents of rain. Rimington moved on for a short distance and camped at Victoria Spruit. It must be confessed that the subsequent action of the British force was disappointing. The accounts which reached Rimington led him to believe that de Wet was being reinforced to a strength of 1,600, while the Victoria Spruit position was a poor one for defence. On these grounds

Combat near Spytfontein, Nov. 29.

Rimington retreats, Nov. 29.

Rimington decided to withdraw by night towards Heilbron. He started at 11 P.M., reached Rustfontein on the afternoon of the 30th and Heilbron on December 1.

Comments on the retreat.

De Wet, when all his force was concentrated, certainly had no more than 1,000 rifles, with one scarcely serviceable pom-pom. But had he been as strong as Rimington was led to anticipate, the course that officer took would still have been hardly worthy of his record and reputation. His own column was one of the best in the field. That he would have inflicted a severe defeat on de Wet is very unlikely; but with 2,000 men and six guns he should at least have held his own in a defensive action and inflicted much loss. To beat a stealthy retreat without firing a shot was a confession of weakness which had a bad moral effect. Yet, it would be unfair to accuse Rimington of timidity. The incident was but one more proof of the tyranny exercised over the minds of even the best column-commanders by the mechanical theory of warfare. Avowed sceptic as he was as to the value of combined movements, Rimington, in wiring to headquarters on the 28th, had urged the old expedient of sending a concourse of columns to surround the scene of the Krygsraad. None having appeared, it did not occur to him as reasonable to fight with the force he had. Yet time had amply proved that such opportunities afforded the only means of bringing a Boer force to battle. On this occasion it is by no means likely that de Wet would have accepted the challenge. In his own writings, while professing great disgust at the unexpected retirement of the British, he admits that he took no proper steps to observe them during the night. After an inactivity of eight months we may well suppose that he would have hesitated to commit his newly mobilised force to a severe action. Having finished his council of war in peace, de Wet carried his force to Lindley. Hattingh and Wessel Wessels, to the latter of whom we shall have to return shortly, now left him to regain their own districts.

Another drive, Dec. 8–12.

Rimington, on reaching Heilbron, wired to headquarters a full account of the concentration on which he had stumbled and suggested a combined movement in which he, Elliot, Byng, Damant and Wilson should participate. This move-

Novelties of method.

ment, though it was as barren as its predecessors, is interesting for several reasons. It was the first in which cross-country lines of blockhouses were utilised. One of these, that from Kroonstad to Lindley, only complete, however, as far as Kaalfontein Bridge, was part of the southern boundary of the drive; another, that from Frankfort to Heilbron, continued by the branch railway line from Heilbron to Wolvehoek, was the northern boundary. The western limit was the trunk railway. Thus two sides and part of a third side of a square consisted of blockhouse lines. The fourth side was to be the Liebenberg's Vlei River, and here we come to the second interesting feature of the movement. This was a feint planned upon a gigantic scale. All the columns—Elliot starting from Kroonstad on the 8th, Byng from Kaalfontein Bridge on the 9th, Rimington, Damant and Wilson from Frankfort on the 10th—were to march towards the Liebenberg's Vlei, cross it as though about to sweep to the east and on the 11th to double back to the west and move in line to the railway. On the eastward march, gaps were to be left through which it was hoped that the enemy would break back to the west, only to find themselves surrounded by columns and blockhouses. But perhaps the most important feature of all was an attempt to give unity and grip to the latter half of the movement by linking up the outposts of adjoining columns at night. It was Rimington who had urged this course, and he himself, by dint of placing the whole of his force on outpost duty on the critical night of the 11th, managed to carry it out. Elliot did not attempt it, and, indeed, it is obvious that the troops were insufficient to carry out such a counsel of perfection. Yet without some such expedient these big drives were wasted. It is something, however, that the attempt was made; for it bore fruit two months later.

Action of Quaggafontein, Dec. 8.

De Wet, whose position at Lindley, on the British right flank, left him complete liberty of action, came into contact with Broadwood's column, the southernmost of Elliot's group, on the 8th. With about 800 men de Wet took up a position at Quaggafontein, on the right bank of the Valsch River. There ensued a desultory action in which neither side showed

much spirit. On Byng's coming up to support Broadwood, the Boers retired to the south and were not pursued. The drive, robbed of its main interest, proceeded on the original lines, and produced little result. The great feint deceived some local burghers, however, who, accordingly, struck back to the west, and on the 12th, to the number of about 300, were between Elliot's right and Rimington's left. Other small parties were scattered about within the cordon. During the night of the 12th, by sacrificing a quantity of wagons and spent horses, all managed to escape. The blockhouse lines hardly affected matters at all.

The drive fails.

Before returning to de Wet and the main Boer force, we must turn aside to describe an incident which, as an indirect result of the Council of War, happened a week later in the Vrede district.

III

Tafel Kop

The blockhouse line, already complete between Heilbron and Frankfort and now being pushed eastward to Tafel Kop and Vrede, had reached Dundas, a farm twelve miles from Frankfort and eight from Tafel Kop. Brig.-General Edward Hamilton, who was in charge of the work, reported on the 16th that his small covering force was meeting with opposition and without assistance could make no further progress. Kitchener, therefore, ordered Rimington and Damant to move out from Heilbron, where they were resting after the drive, and to clear Hamilton's front. They started on December 17. The force troubling the blockhouse work consisted of 300 men of the Vrede commando, under Wessel Wessels and Commandants Ross and de Kock. Fresh from the Council of War and de Wet's bellicose exhortations, Wessels was seeking an opportunity for some damaging stroke. His chance occurred on the 20th. At dawn on that day Rimington and Damant, after a difficult night march from Frankfort in thunder, rain and hail, were a little to the north of Tafel Kop, a very conspicuous conical hill rising 600 feet above the plain and commanding a wide view over

Rimington and Damant march against Wessel Wessels, Dec. 17–20.

the Wilge River valley. A report, perfectly well founded, was now received that a commando of 300 Boers was between Tafel Kop and the Wilge. Rimington and Damant arranged accordingly to wheel round the kop and to sweep on a broad front towards the river. The two columns swung round the eastern shoulder of the hill and then separated, but, unfortunately, without keeping touch. Both leaders were accustomed to work together and to take tactical liberties with a persistently evasive foe, but on this occasion they undervalued their antagonist, who happened to want to fight. Two small tributaries of the Wilge, the Riet Spruit and the Kalk Spruit, rise in the neighbourhood of Tafel Kop, and, diverging slightly, join the main stream about ten and twelve miles, respectively, to the westward of the kop. Rimington rode down the southernmost stream, the Kalk Spruit, and on sighting a party of Boers to the south, threw out his left still further in that direction. Damant advanced in widely extended order along the Riet Spruit. At Sweet Home he came into contact with 100 Boers and pushed them westwards over the farm Bacchante. Here he halted to wait for Rimington, whose nearest troops were now some miles to the south.

Damant's position, Dec. 20.

Damant's force was a small one, comprising only three weak squadrons of Damant's "Tigers" and three companies of Yeomanry (30th, 31st and 91st), about 550 rifles in all, together with two guns of the 30th Battery and a pom-pom. When Damant halted, his line had become inordinately extended. He himself, with his staff, the three guns, a Maxim and an escort composed of the 91st Company of Yeomanry and 45 Damant's Horse were nearly at the summit of a long flat-topped hill with a steep descent to the west, overlooking the Wilge. This was about the left centre of the line. "A" squadron of Damant's Horse under Lieutenant Guy Wilson, was on the left, at the southern foot of the hill and out of sight. "B" and "C" squadrons were on the right, widely extended, and still further to the right were the 30th and 31st Companies of Yeomanry. The whole line covered about four miles. From where Damant stood, he and his staff could see the

valley of the Wilge spread out before them and the river itself flowing in its deep fissured bed some three miles to the west. Parties of Boers were seen to be making their way across it or riding up and down the banks. Nor were these the only objects of interest. In the plain, about a mile to the right front, five small bodies of mounted troops were drawn up in regular formation. All present seem to have assumed that they were the Yeomanry of General Edward Hamilton, who, from his base at the head of the blockhouse line, had arranged to demonstrate towards Tafel Kop. As they were drawn up in the formation used by Yeomanry the view taken was a natural one. Presently they began to move in a leisurely way towards the hill occupied by Damant, throwing out scouts and skirmishers, who appeared to be dressed in khaki, and actually firing occasional volleys at the Boers near the river. Their course led them close to "B" squadron of Damant's Horse, under Captain Scott, which was posted at the northern foot of the long hill on which the guns and staff were situated. Scott felt no suspicion until the squadrons drew near. Then it was suddenly realised that they were Boers, and fire was opened. But it was too late. The perpetrators of this audacious ruse broke into a gallop at the first shot, and, still keeping their general direction, passed Scott's front and disappeared behind the steep slopes of the hill. Damant, too, had seen them, and in a flash perceived the object of the ruse and the peril of his own small party. He was not occupying the highest point of the hill. Directly to his front a portion of the crest rose to a rugged irregular cone, covered with rocks and long grass and commanding the lower ground where the guns and their escort were posted. The limbers were safe in the rear, on lower ground still.

The Boer ruse.

Guessing rightly that the Boers had left their horses on the level and were climbing up the slope to gain the commanding crest, Damant collected some Yeomanry and hurried across to forestall them. The Boers were before him. Ross, leading the foremost of some 200 men, had already reached the summit, and in a few minutes the advanced British party, the guns and the rest of the escort, all

Action of Tafel Kop, Dec. 20.

being in open ground without a particle of shelter, were under a deadly fire, delivered at short range from behind excellent cover. The fight that followed ranks with Bakenlaagte for the magnificent spirit shown in maintaining a hopeless defence against heavy odds. The guns were worked till the last gunners were shot down at their posts—"they lay," says an eye-witness, "in heaps round the guns." The Yeomanry, fighting no less gallantly, were nearly exterminated. Damant was hit in four places; the staff were all killed or wounded; of nine officers on the hill only one was not disabled. This was Lieutenant Maturin, the officer commanding the artillery, who although he had received a bullet through his side, resolved to save the limbers and managed to gallop them away with the loss of some of their drivers. He then rode off to communicate with Rimington. After nearly an hour's fighting, the Boers crowded down and took possession. The teams and limbers having disappeared, they could do nothing with the guns, but they smashed the Maxim, rolled the pom-pom over the crest of the hill, and began to pillage the dead and wounded.

The Boers driven off.

So suddenly and under such strange circumstances had the affair happened, that a considerable time elapsed before any organised relief could be sent. Rimington, though he had turned northward as soon as he heard the firing, was too far away to be of any use. Guy Wilson, unable to see what was going on, had been so completely deceived that, until he heard of the disaster, he imagined that Damant had ambushed the Boers. Captain Scott, with the two other squadrons of Damant's "Tigers," felt himself not strong enough to assault the position unaided, and some time elapsed before he was able to call in the 30th and 31st Yeomanry from their distant position on the extreme right. As soon as this was done he led the united force against the hill and very gallantly retook it. The Boers made no determined stand and after slight loss fled. Soon afterwards Rimington came up; but the enemy by this time were too far off for pursuit. The British casualties were 78—33 killed and 45 wounded—out of a total of 90, which included a detachment of native scouts. Captain Gaussen, commanding the Yeomanry, Captain Jeffcoat, of the

Losses.

staff, and Lieutenant Shand, of Damant's Horse, were killed. Among the wounded were Major Webb, commanding Damant's Horse, and Lieutenants Armstrong and C. Wilson. The Boer casualties were 20 or 30. Colonel Damant survived his wounds, and ere long was fighting again with as much spirit as before.

Comments on the action.

The incident was one of a sort that was bound to happen occasionally in operations of this kind. If Damant's line was dangerously extended and Rimington was out of touch, it was because both leaders had found by experience that it generally paid to take such risks. As to the ruse devised by Wessels, the ingenious idea of manœuvring like Yeomanry and firing at his own men certainly deserved success. But the use of khaki skirmishers was not justifiable. As we have said before, it is difficult to condemn the Boers, at this stage of the war, for wearing British uniforms, but deliberately to use such uniforms for purposes of deception cannot be defended. One lesson to be drawn from the fight was that guns, if they were to be used at all in operations of this sort, should have had larger escorts. But for the guns, which, owing to their unprotected position, could not be limbered up, there was no reason why the party on the hill should not have retired upon their nearest supports or to a better position. As it was, honour made it imperative to cling to a false tactical position in order to save the artillery.

IV

Tigerkloof Spruit

De Wet evades a third drive and concentrates on the Langberg, Dec. 8–18.

We must now return to de Wet, whom we left on December 8 retreating southward from Lindley. At Kaffir Kop, a commanding hill some twenty miles to the north-west of Bethlehem, de Wet halted his burghers, and proceeded, according to his wont, to spread them over the neighbouring farms. His presence at Kaffir Kop having been reported to headquarters, Kitchener directed Elliot, who had concentrated his force near Kroonstad, to march on the Kop from the north, while the Winburg force came up from the south-west.

To block the east, Kitchener ordered Dartnell, with both regiments of I.L.H. and some Yeomanry, to march from Harrismith to Bethlehem and from thence to act under orders from Elliot. Elliot arranged that all the columns were to converge towards Kaffir Kop at dawn on the 17th. The movement was duly carried out, and duly failed. De Wet, fully warned, dispersed his force, with orders to reunite on the Langberg, that clump of steep and rugged hills which lies to the south-east of Bethlehem. He had suffered a serious loss in the death of the brave Commandant Haasbroek, who was killed in a brush with Barker and the Winburg force. Elliot returned to Kroonstad to rest his columns after six weeks of almost incessant marching and the Winburg force returned to its base. Lastly, Dartnell proceeded on the 18th to return from Bethlehem to Harrismith, a march which necessarily led him close to de Wet and the Langberg. Thus, after all these weeks of combined movements, de Wet, as on November 28, was left face to face with an isolated British column.

Dartnell and Campbell.

The two regiments of Imperial Light Horse, under Colonels Briggs and D. McKenzie, which Dartnell now commanded, had left Harrismith about 800 strong. Before leaving that town Dartnell had also borrowed from Rundle the 11th Battalion of Yeomanry, under Major Haag, numbering some 400 rifles. He thus had a mounted force of 1,200 men, with two guns of the 79th Battery and two pom-poms. He had no heavy transport to hamper his mobility, only a few carts and pack-horses. At his present starting-point, Bethlehem, the garrison under Colonel Inglefield had just been reinforced by the arrival from the Brandwater Basin of General Barrington Campbell and part of the 16th Brigade. Campbell, who had been established in the Basin for several months, had latterly been engaged in constructing a line of blockhouses, which was intended to run from Ficksburg through Brindisi, Fouriesburg and Retief's Nek, to Bethlehem. Though the line was not yet finished, Rundle, under pressure from Kitchener, had ordered Campbell to fortify salient points as best he could and then to

withdraw from the Basin all the troops that he could spare for service outside its borders.

On the morning of the 18th Dartnell and Campbell were fully aware of the situation; for one of de Wet's burghers surrendered himself and reported that his master, with seven commandos, was waiting for Dartnell on the road to Harrismith. Campbell, accordingly, promised to follow with a mounted force to a point some five miles outside the town, and to reinforce Dartnell in case the latter was attacked. It is typical of all these operations against de Wet that both officers contemplated a purely defensive action. The principal features on the road, fifty-three miles in length, from Bethlehem to Harrismith, a road travelled incessantly by convoys and perfectly familiar to all units of the British force, were three rivers and a mountain range. Of the rivers the Liebenberg's Vlei crosses the road four miles out of Bethlehem, the Tigerkloof Spruit about fifteen miles further on, and the Eland's River, spanned by a fine steel bridge, about sixteen miles beyond the Tigerkloof Spruit. The mountain range is the Langberg, whose western spurs overlook the Liebenberg's Vlei, while the range itself runs nearly parallel to the road as far as the Tigerkloof Spruit. Many deep kloofs and dongas fall from the range toward the road. De Wet's dispositions were simple. He had posted half of his 900 men behind a ridge overlooking the west bank of the spruit at the point where it crosses the road. The other half was concealed in the kloofs at the eastern end of the Langberg. The former body was to make a frontal attack on Dartnell as soon as he neared the spruit; the latter was to fall upon his rear and right flank. The signal for a simultaneous attack from all quarters was to be a shot fired from the one gun which the Boer force possessed, a dilapidated pom-pom, destitute of belts for quick-firing purposes and furnished with shells which would not burst. It was placed on a hill overlooking the east bank of the spruit, and de Wet stationed himself near it.

De Wet plans an attack, Dec. 18.

Map, p. 442.

The British column marched from Bethlehem at 8 A.M., McKenzie, with the 2nd I.L.H. and a pom-pom, forming the advance guard, Briggs, with the 1st I.L.H. and a pom-pom,

Action of Tigerkloof Spruit, Dec. 18.

the rear and left flank guards. The 15-pounders and the Yeomanry were in the centre, with a squadron thrown out to search the kloofs on the right flank. Nothing occurred till 11 o'clock, when McKenzie's foremost men neared the ridge overlooking Tigerkloof Spruit. Then de Wet gave the signal. His burghers, however, failed to respond to it in the manner he had expected. Some 200, who were under his immediate eye, made a very determined charge upon McKenzie, but the I.L.H. received the attack steadily, repulsed it at the cost of three men wounded and established themselves firmly on the ridge. Most of the Boers who had taken part in this abortive attack now mounted their horses, galloped along the whole extent of Dartnell's right flank and joined in an assault on his rear. But this assault, through the inaction of the commandos originally detailed for it, was not delivered until Briggs had taken up a good position on a ridge about two miles behind McKenzie. A gently undulating valley lay between the two positions. With his Yeomanry extended along the right flank facing the Langberg kloofs and his 15-pounders also on this flank, posted at a point where they commanded the whole field, Dartnell was now tolerably safe. Although the attack on Briggs was vehement—four officers and eight men being wounded—a reinforcement of Yeomanry turned the scale, and the assailants retired to the Langberg.* The approach of Campbell from Bethlehem with 400 Yeomanry and three guns precipitated their retreat. After this the action became desultory. Commando by commando the Boers left the field and trooped off in full view towards an intricate nest of hills and kloofs some seven miles further to the south-east. They were shelled, but with little effect, and no effort was made to hasten their retreat. At 3 o'clock Dartnell moved on, camping at Mooimeisjesrust for the night, and reaching Eland's River Bridge, without further opposition, on the 19th. Although de Wet, in his own account of the action, blames the cowardice of his men, we may suppose that, when the situation had declared itself, both he and

* Dr. Crean of the I.L.H. received the V.C. for gallantry in attending wounded on this occasion.

they were thoroughly disillusioned. They had expected a heavy convoy for which it was worth while to fight. Instead, they found a compact mounted force, marching without transport. On the British side, at any rate after the first hour of the action, these feelings might have been divined. With only nineteen casualties and with Campbell's reinforcements, Dartnell's passive attitude was scarcely necessary. It is true that the ground over which the Boers retired was exceedingly difficult and that a pursuit might have effected little; but this was no reason for not attempting reprisals. It is only fair to add that the effective power of the column was somewhat impaired by the strained relations existing between Dartnell and the officers in command of the two regiments of I.L.H. Accustomed for some time past to act independently, they seem to have given to their brigadier less loyal support than he deserved. Dartnell, who was strongly of opinion that a larger column was needed for operating against de Wet, appealed to Kitchener in this sense, and having been met with a refusal, resigned his command. The two regiments henceforth acted independently.

V

Tweefontein

De Wet enters Rundle's district, Dec. 18.

After the action of Tigerkloof Spruit, de Wet, for the third time within three weeks, was left to his own resources. This was the more unfortunate because the district he had now entered was not only well adapted for concealment, but at this moment presented tempting opportunities for a bold stroke. We have noted in previous chapters that General Rundle's district, represented roughly by the triangle Ficksburg-Bethlehem-Harrismith, was the most backward in the Free State. Although the three towns at the three angles were held by strong garrisons, the Brandwater Basin, ringed by its wild and lofty mountains, was only in nominal occupation. The Roodebergen, the Wittebergen, the Langberg, and many minor groups of hills were secure refuges for the enemy. Witzieshoek, south of Harrismith, perhaps the

most formidable stronghold of all, had scarcely been touched. Not a third of the farms in the district had been cleared, and on many the farmers were pursuing their ordinary avocations.

Rundle's resources and difficulties.

For this state of things Rundle's responsibility was relatively small. Until the arrival of the I.L.H. in September no really mobile column had operated in his district, and during September and October half of the I.L.H. were absent in Natal. The regiments, moreover, except for purely administrative purposes, were not under Rundle's orders. He could request and suggest, but he could not direct. When the requirements of the garrison towns were satisfied, the only mounted troops under Rundle's direct orders at this date were 400 M.I. of the 2nd Manchester and 1st South Staffordshire regiments and two battalions of Yeomanry, each about 450 strong.* One of these, the 4th, was now with Campbell's brigade at Bethlehem; the other was the 11th, which had been engaged at Tigerkloof under Dartnell and had now returned to Eland's River Bridge. Both had been mainly occupied in escorting convoys and, latterly, in covering the construction of blockhouse lines.

Blockhouse construction.

Three such lines were now being established in Rundle's district. That from Bethlehem through the Brandwater Basin to Ficksburg has just been mentioned. A second, from Harrismith to Oliver's Hoek, was a short but useful line. The third was the Bethlehem-Harrismith section of the great through line, 160 miles in length, from Kroonstad to Harrismith. This line had been begun at both ends. On the west, as we saw a few pages back, it had nearly reached Lindley; on the east it had reached Eland's River Bridge, eighteen miles from Harrismith, and Rundle was now proceeding to push it forward to Bethlehem. The covering column consisted of the 11th Yeomanry, now restored to Rundle's command,

The covering column on the main line of construction.

* In April 3,000 unorganised and untrained Yeomanry of the second draft had been sent to him, but 20 per cent., including the majority of the officers, had to be sent back as inefficient. The rest, principally by the exertions of Colonel Firman, had been formed into three battalions (1st, 4th and 11th), officered afresh, and trained under great difficulties. Some of the best of the resulting squadrons were taken from Rundle and sent to other districts. The rest had dwindled under ordinary wastage.

150 men of the East Yorkshire Regiment, one gun of the 79th Battery and a pom-pom. Until his departure on leave in the second week of December, Colonel Firman, an officer who had done good work in organising Rundle's Yeomanry, had commanded the column. His natural successor would have been Major Haag, now at the head of the 11th Yeomanry; but Haag was considered to be too young for the post and Major Williams of the 1st South Staffords was given the temporary command. On December 21, the column marched thirteen miles from Eland's River Bridge to the farm lands of Tweefontein, drove out some Boers found there, and encamped on the top of a lonely hill named Groenkop. Here the column was well placed for the observation of the Langberg, whose nearest spur was some six miles away to the west, and of the hardly less wild and difficult country lying to the south-west and south. Behind them the block-house line was creeping out from Eland's River Bridge. By the 24th the head of the line had reached Tradouw, a farm about three miles to the north-east of Groenkop, and Rundle himself had come out to this point, in order to superintend the work in person.

Map, p. 442.

Rundle's dispositions, Dec. 24.

On this day, the 24th, two small but noteworthy movements of troops took place. In the first place, Williams's force was weakened by the withdrawal of the 150 infantry, who were sent by Rundle to Tradouw, for the purpose of protecting the working parties and of manning the next batch of posts. On the same day Rundle reconnoitred the country towards Tigerkloof Spruit, with a view to selecting sites, and in the evening fixed his headquarters at Mooimeisjesrust (Dyason's farm), three miles due north of Groenkop and about the same distance north-west of Tradouw. His escort consisted of 270 Grenadier Guards, 60 mounted infantry, drawn from the South Staffordshire Regiment and one gun of the 79th Battery. On the evening of the 24th, therefore, there were three weak British detachments—the largest 470 in number, the smallest 150—within three miles of one another, at the corners of the small triangle, Groenkop, Tradouw, Mooimeisjesrust. The I.L.H. lay at Eland's River Bridge, thirteen miles to the east, too far to lend prompt

succour in the event of a sudden attack on one of the three small detachments. Even in normal times such a dispersion of troops would have been rash; and the present situation was far from normal. Only six days before a strong Boer force, for the first time for many months, had appeared in the district, had fought an action within six miles of the triangle just described, and had since been lost to view.

Deficient intelligence.

On the 24th, however, Rundle's intelligence had reported that there were 70 fighting Boers, all told, scattered in tens and fives, in the district south of the Bethlehem-Harrismith road, and on these reports Rundle based his dispositions. As regards the district north of the road, the central Intelligence was issuing daily warnings of probable attacks on Harrismith, Eland's River Bridge and other points, but, in default of any proper military observation of de Wet's force, these warnings were of very little value. If the I.L.H. could not at the time be used to maintain this proper military observation, the Yeomanry on Groenkop at any rate were available; but during their stay on the kop these troops were practically relegated to the *rôle* of infantry. On the 22nd Williams sent out an expedition with orders to clear Tweefontein farm, which lies some three miles south of the kop at the foot of another and higher hill, and to eject from this hill some Boers who were using it as an observation post. Although the farm was destroyed, and the Boers temporarily driven away, no extended reconnaissance was made. On the 23rd and 24th, save for one short ride by a small party, the force was confined to its eyrie on Groenkop.

The position at Groenkop, Dec. 24.

It is time to describe this position in greater detail. From the plan the reader will see that the kop juts out into the plain like a promontory into the sea. On the east the base is broad and the ascent gentle. Contracting rapidly, the hill, at a height of 250 feet, is reduced to a plateau about 250 yards in diameter, in the midst of which is a rocky knoll some twenty feet higher still. On every side but the east this plateau drops sharply to the plain, the western frontage being the steepest of all. The sides, however, are not so steep but that men on foot and in daylight can climb them with tolerable ease, while at some

points there are gullies which permit the ascent even of horses, if very carefully led. The withdrawal of the infantry, on the morning of the 24th, left Williams with the 11th Yeomanry, under Major Haag, a gun of the 79th Battery, under Lieutenant Scarlett, and a pom-pom. Of the four companies composing the Yeomanry battalion, the 34th (Middlesex) under Captain Hall, the 36th (West Kent) under Lieutenant Hudson, and the 53rd (East Kent) under Captain Crawley, were well up to the general standard of efficiency; but the 35th (Middlesex) Company, which had been formed at a later date, had sunk into a weak and inefficient condition. It was only 40 strong. On the evening of the 24th the camp was disposed as follows. Just below the eastern lip of the plateau, where the descent is comparatively gentle, were the headquarters tents; a little lower in the same direction were the four companies of Yeomanry; lower still the horse-lines and transport, and, lowest of all, the hospital. In emplacements on the plateau itself, near the northern side, were the two guns.

Outposts.

The arrangements made for the defence of the camp at night were far from perfect. On the night of the 24th about 60 men, comprising the whole of the weak 35th Company, and detachments from others, were employed on outpost duty. On the grassy eastern slopes, the pickets, although, perhaps, rather too near the camp, had an unobstructed view and a good range of hearing. But on the steep sides of the plateau, which was the key to the whole position, it had been assumed, too confidently, that an attack was impossible, or at any rate highly improbable. Hence the six pickets in this quarter had all been disposed around the top of the cliff. Since the foot of the cliff and much of the declivity was "dead ground" from the crest, the range of sight and hearing possessed by these pickets was limited. To make the kop absolutely secure, an additional precaution was necessary, namely, the patrolling of the base of the cliff. This precaution was not taken. The defect, however, might have been neutralised by intelligent watchfulness on the part of the sentries, rigorously enforced by superior inspection; but by a fatality all the pickets on the plateau on this particular

night were drawn from the inefficient 35th Company. No officer slept with the pickets, and on this particular night gross negligence prevailed. The sentries, there can be little doubt, did not descend a yard below the crest, and some must have slept at their posts.

De Wet's movements and plans, Dec. 18–24.

Such was the situation of the Groenkop force on Christmas Eve, 1901. We must now return to de Wet, who, on the 18th, after his action with Dartnell, had retired to the eastern foot-hills of the Langberg. There, according to his wont, he had scattered his commandos over a convenient area, with orders to be ready to concentrate at a moment's notice. During the next few days he received two small reinforcements. A hundred burghers under Jan Jacobsz were summoned from their fastness at Witzieshoek; another party of about the same strength, under Beukes, from the Wilge River. Whereas Rundle had allowed for 70 Boers, there were actually 1,100, within immediate call of their commander-in-chief. Concealed behind a screen of pickets, de Wet had been able to keep a close watch on his adversaries. He had observed the progress of the block-house line; he had seen Williams march out to Groenkop on the 21st; he had watched the expedition to Tweefontein on the 22nd; and now, on the 24th, he saw the infantry leave the kop and march to Tradouw. Nor was this the full extent of his knowledge. One of his observation posts was established on a hill 200 feet higher than Groenkop and overlooking it from the south. This was the post which had been driven away by the Yeomanry in the course of the expedition of the 22nd and had promptly re-occupied the hill. From the summit a bird's-eye view of the British camp and every detail of its defences could be obtained. To make the task of inspection easier, the night outposts were in the habit of taking up their positions in broad daylight and the sentries used to march on their beats with fixed bayonets against the sky-line. From its first arrival on the kop, de Wet had marked down the force for destruction and on seeing the infantry march away he resolved to put the scheme into prompt execution, basing his plan of attack on an exact knowledge of the outpost line and its obvious defects. According

to his own account, his last precaution was to verify the precise situation of the guns by sending out decoys to draw their fire. There seems to have been no necessity for such a step; for, although the emplacements may have been not quite visible from the coign of vantage just referred to, the guns had already been fired for the purpose of finding ranges. Whatever the motive may have been, on the morning of the 24th, in the course of a reconnoitring ride by de Wet and his staff, Commandant Olivier and Captain Potgieter rode out boldly towards the kop, and under the very eyes of the garrison, chased and seized a Kaffir who was driving in some loose horses. After questioning the native for a minute or two, one of the Boers shot the poor fellow dead. The scene had been watched from the kop; there was a murmur of general indignation, then a burst of unauthorised musketry (useless, for the range was over 2,000 yards); and then the sergeant in charge of the 15-pounder opened fire. The pom-pom followed suit, and a shower of shell followed the two Boer officers as they galloped back to de Wet. They reached him unscathed.

De Wet concentrates and marches on Groenkop, night of Dec. 24–5.

Having through this audacious and insulting manœuvre secured his last information, de Wet immediately sent out messengers ordering a concentration on the same night near the Tigerkloof Spruit, about eight miles to the north of Groenkop. Including the reinforcements just received 1,000 men assembled, under the same leaders as heretofore, with two noteworthy additions. On the day before, General Brand and Commandant Coetzee happened to have come on a visit to de Wet from the south-east of the Free State, and both volunteered to partake in the expedition. A discussion arose as to the side from which the kop should be attacked. Though some leaders were in favour of the east or easy side, de Wet had made up his mind, and now carried his point, that an assault should be attempted from the least likely quarter, the precipitous sides of the plateau. A hundred men were left to guard the pom-pom and pack-horses, and soon after midnight the rest moved off across the plain, each commando riding in single file. It was a moonlight night, but the shadows of passing clouds and a light veil of mist shrouded the march

of the force. The first stage of the expedition was thus safely accomplished, and at a few minutes before 2 A.M. on Christmas morning the burghers were massed in the dead ground at the foot of the kop. Here they dismounted and in absolute silence and good order prepared for the ascent. To climb in a strong continuous line was impossible; for at most points the cliffs were too steep to be scaled successfully in the dark; but two practicable gullies on the northern face were found and up these gullies two storming parties, led by Brand and Mears, climbed in single file and in stockinged feet. Of the rest of the force, a few were left to guard the horses, some were sent round to the eastern slopes of the hill to await developments and the rest followed close on the heels of the storming parties.

Action of Tweefontein (or Groenkop). Storming of the plateau, 2 A.M. Dec. 25.

It is humiliating to record that the heads of both these parties were nearly on a level with the crest when the first challenge was given and the first shot fired.* Then the cry of "storm" rang out and was echoed from mouth to mouth down the cliff. Secrecy was abandoned; scrambling up the rocks and ledges, the Boers, constantly reinforced by new arrivals from below, spread out to right and left along the crest, so that in a few minutes the north side of the little plateau was thronged with riflemen who fell upon and cut to pieces the pickets nearest to them, grappled at close quarters with the gunners in their emplacements, and poured an ever-increasing volume of fire across the plateau. For a short space, however, the attack went no further.

Attempts to meet the attack.

In the sleeping camp the first alarm was given by a crackle of fire on the plateau above, waxing to a sustained roar of musketry. The fact cannot be disguised that in the course of the next twenty minutes nearly a third of the force gave way to panic and fled, half-dressed and in many cases unarmed, to the nearest British camps. Of the rest, however, all the gunners and a considerable proportion of the Yeomanry turned out steadily, preserved a military bearing

* It will never be possible to ascertain with certainty exactly what occurred. Only one sentry survived, stating at the official inquiry that he saw the Boers, but that they were "too many to fire at." In other words, he gave way to panic.

and did their best, under cool guidance from their officers, to face the storm with discipline and courage. Stations had been allotted to each company of Yeomanry in the event of an attack, the western face of the plateau to the 34th, the northern to the 36th and the southern to the 53rd. The weak 35th Company was already out of action, the pickets which it contributed having been either exterminated or utterly demoralised. As long as the Boers held to the northern edge of the plateau, their bullets swept harmlessly over the camp, which was on a lower level; but as soon as the Yeomanry left the camp and attempted to gain their stations they suffered severe losses. One company, however, owing to the nature of the ground, escaped these losses. This was the 53rd, to which had been allotted some sangars on a ledge some twenty feet below the southern crest of the plateau. Falling in nearly to their full strength, under Captain Crawley, the company reached these sangars safely and took post. In the meantime the plateau was on the verge of being lost. The 36th Company lost its leader, Lieutenant Hudson, in the first attempt to reach its perilous station and never succeeded in gaining any coherent formation; but some 50 men of the 34th, gallantly led by Captain Hall and Lieutenants Agnew and Stutfield, breasted the hill and endeavoured to gain the western face of the plateau. In point of fact, there were scarcely any Boers on the narrow western front, but as soon as the Yeomanry appeared on the skyline they were enfiladed with terrible effect from the north; Hall and Agnew were shot dead, Stutfield wounded and most of the squadron put out of action. Major Williams, who showed great bravery in the hour of disaster, joined the company half-way and ordered the remnants to lie down. This they did, with the flash of the Boer rifles scarcely ten yards away on their right flank. A moment later a simultaneous movement took place among the Boers. Secure hitherto among their rocks, they now leaped forward in an irregular half-circle, some 300 strong, and charged over the plateau, shoulder to shoulder, yelling and firing.

Storming and capture of the camp.

Though nothing could have stopped the momentum of this charge, in one unexpected quarter it suffered a slight check.

This came from the 53rd Company, ensconced in its sangars below the plateau. These men, looking behind them, and seeing a crowd of Boers silhouetted against the star-lit sky-line, opened fire. The crowd scattered and recoiled, leaving many wounded. A few, however, returned the fire, and mortally wounded Captain Crawley, a very promising officer. The rest closed on their left, disappeared from the view of the 53rd and continued the charge. Both guns had already fallen. Scarlett, commanding the 15-pounder, had been the first on the hill, had fired two shots, lost several gunners and had been taken prisoner. Hardwick, in charge of the pom-pom, had also fired twice and had been killed at his post. Sweeping past the gun-pits, the charge engulfed the shattered remnants of the 34th Company and several superior officers. Williams was killed, Grice, the adjutant, was mortally wounded and Haag, commanding the Yeomanry, was badly hit. Reaching the eastern edge of the plateau, the charge swept down through the outlying tents of the camp. Here a little band of brave men made a desperate effort to repel the rush. It was the Maxim section of the Yeomanry, under Lieutenant Watney, a boy of only twenty. Watney had rallied his detachment, but in the darkness and turmoil had not known whither to fire his Maxim. He now headed a charge up the hill. His section was swallowed up in a moment and he lost his own life.

The plateau was now lost and the camp at the mercy of the Boers. Abandoning all regular formation, they poured down the eastern slopes through the tents, transport, horse-lines and hospital, killing, capturing and looting. Burghers who had hung back till success was assured swarmed up to the scene of plunder. Finally, those sent round to complete envelopment on the east drove the pickets out of their trenches and forced them back into the tumult and slaughter of the camp. In the lines of the hospital Dr. Reid, a civilian doctor, was unfortunately killed, but Major Caldwell, the senior medical officer, survived and performed his duties with admirable devotion throughout this terrible night. One of his first acts was to find de Wet and ask protection for the hospital, a request promptly granted and rigidly enforced.

Though the victory was won, there yet remained one organised British detachment holding its ground firmly. This was the 53rd Company, posted below the southern edge of the plateau, with their backs to the now useless sangars; their captain mortally wounded and Lieutenant Parsons now in command. When the Boer charge had swerved out of sight, they remained for nearly an hour in the same position, ignorant as to the course of events, and not seriously molested. Above them, the crest of the plateau was occasionally crowned by groups of Boers, who recoiled under their fire; on lower ground to their right, a few outlying tents were just visible. Snipers, hidden in rocks, occasionally harassed the company, but in the darkness and uproar de Wet seems to have overlooked the existence of this isolated band. When the firing in camp subsided—about an hour, that is, after the first alarm—Parsons sent out Sergeant White and Private Dack towards the camp to try and open communication with other units. Dack was killed; White returned with the news that the camp was in the hands of the Boers. Parsons then arranged with Lieutenant Mowatt to withdraw the squadron down the cliff, with a view of escaping to the blockhouse line. But de Wet had at length taken steps to deal with this last surviving detachment. The men were beginning the descent when a strong force of Boers appeared on their flank and opened a destructive fire, while others worked round to cut off the retreat. Parsons having been wounded at the first fire, Lieutenant Mowatt took command and organised a plucky, though hopeless, resistance. To cover the retreat of half the company, he made an obstinate stand with the other half, resorting, when all else failed, to rushes with the bayonet. Finally he was wounded, the sergeant-major and troop-sergeant were killed and the wrecks of the company were driven down the hill. About twenty escaped and the rest were captured or shot down. The last shot was fired about 3.15 A.M.

Resistance of the 53rd Company.

By this time the plundering of the camp was far advanced, and de Wet was preparing to return with his booty to the Langberg. It stands to his credit that order

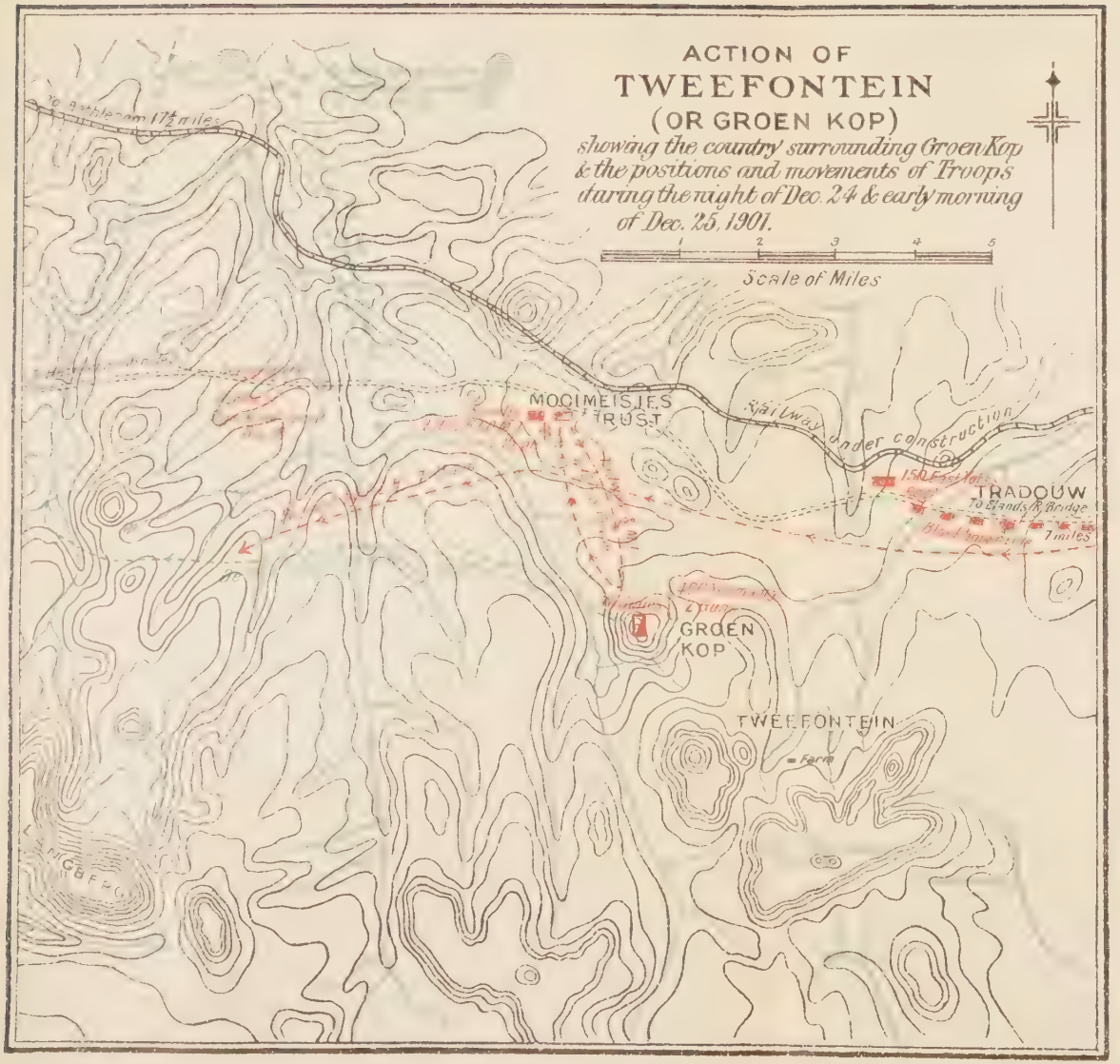
De Wet begins his retreat, 3.30–4 A.M. Dec. 25,

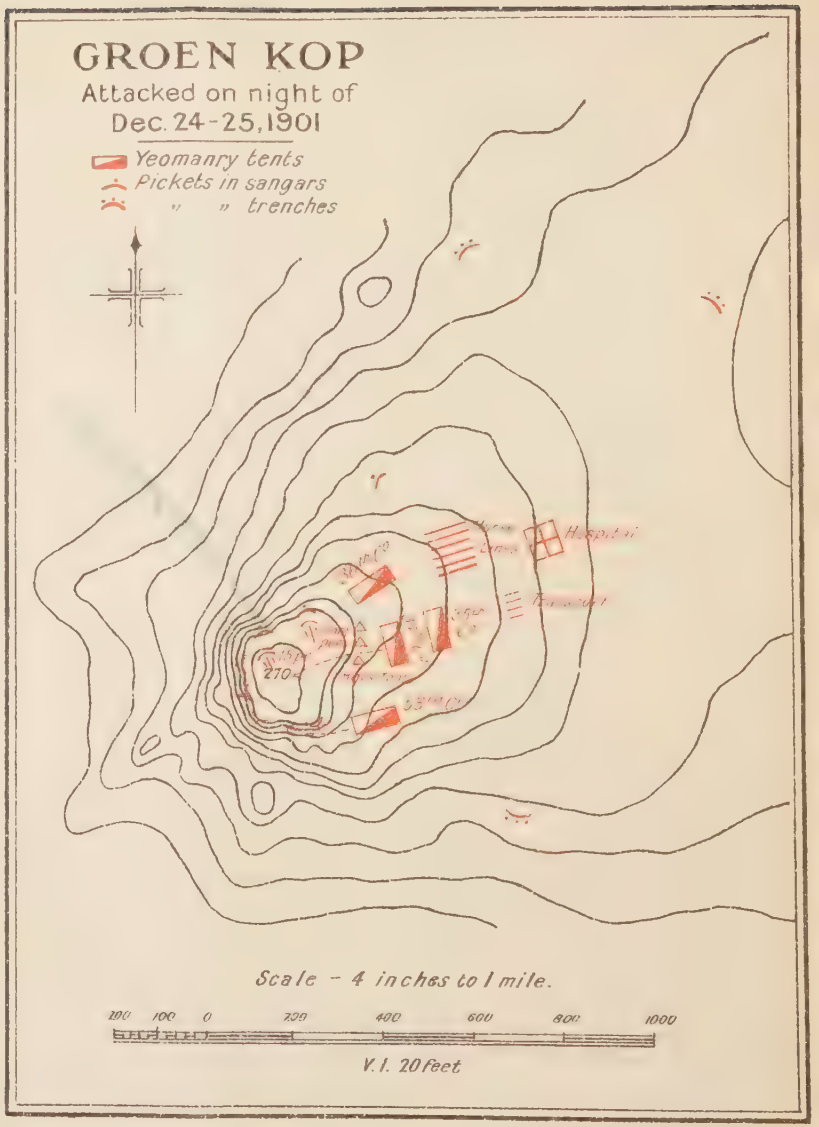
and sobriety were maintained and the most humane treatment meted out to the British wounded. But the Kaffir followers fared badly. Twenty-five were afterwards found dead on the field and there is too good reason to believe that many were slaughtered in cold blood. The British losses had been heavy. Nine officers and 49 men were killed or died of their wounds; 6 officers and 78 men were wounded; 3 officers and 203 men were prisoners of war. On the Boer side, Commandant Olivier * and Field-Cornets Dalebout and Louwrens were among the 14 killed, and Gert de Wet, a nephew of Christiaan, was among the 30 wounded. Between 3.30 and 4, the captured guns were sent off under escort and the transport wagons began to follow, together with the British prisoners, whom de Wet, contrary to the usual custom, had decided to take away. Many Boers, however, still remained on the kop filling the last wagons, burning what they could not remove, and lingering over their Christmas breakfast. Soon after 4 there was a report from the north, and a 15-pounder shell fell among the transport wagons as they wound across the plain towards the Langberg. It came from Rundle's camp, three miles away.

Rundle's action.

Rundle had been awakened at 2 A.M. with the news that heavy firing had broken out at Groenkop. The course he took was to send out his D.A.A.G., Colonel Tudway, with the 60 mounted Staffords, to find out what was happening and, if need be, to assist. Tudway halted his men about 1,000 yards from the kop and pushed on in person with six troopers. Reaching the outskirts of the camp, he saw that it was swarming with men who were shouting to one another in Dutch. He had just realised that the Boers were in possession, when he was summoned to surrender by a Boer party who loomed through the darkness just ahead of him. Two of his men were captured, but he and the other four galloped back with the rest of the mounted infantry to Rundle's camp, arriving at 3.15. The camp being in telegraphic communication with Eland's River Bridge, Rundle at once wired for the I.L.H. Owing to the culpable

* A. J. Bester took Olivier's place in the Bethlehem commando.





Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

neglect of the corporal stationed in the receiving office, no attention was paid to the telegram. McLean, Rundle's A.D.C., was then commissioned to ride through to the Bridge, while Rundle himself struck camp and waited for the dawn. Soon after 4 A.M., the first daylight disclosed the procession of wagons wending its way towards the Langberg. Rundle, as we have seen, opened fire with his single gun. With this he could do no damage and two hours passed before anything further could be done. McLean had galloped the thirteen miles to Eland's River Bridge under the hour; the I.L.H. promptly turned out and made all possible speed; but it was 6.40 when they reached Rundle and 7 when they were ready for a further advance. By this time, de Wet, with all his booty, had safely reached the rugged foothills of the Langberg. The I.L.H. did their best to make an effective pursuit, but had to give it up. For the fourth time within a month touch was absolutely lost with the Boer force. Fine in conception and execution, de Wet's stroke thus met with the full success that it deserved.

De Wet escapes with all his booty.

The question inevitably arises, could Rundle with the troops at his disposal have mitigated or avenged the disaster? One point seems clear, that he should have communicated earlier with the I.L.H.; for it must have been evident, long before 3.15, when Tudway returned, that the Groenkop was heavily engaged. Apart from the failure of the telegraph, a full hour was lost and an hour would have made a serious difference to de Wet in escaping with his booty to the mountains. Whether Rundle in the meantime could have intervened effectually with his own 330 men and the 150 men at Tradouw is an open question. All but 60 were infantry, who certainly could not have arrived on the scene before the camp was overwhelmed, though Rundle's own contingent might well have arrived while the 53rd was still constituting a small nucleus of resistance. The chances of night-fighting are incalculable. When the victors in an assault have fallen into disarray, and while it is still dark, the arrival of even a small hostile reserve, fresh and in good order, may cause a powerful diversion. On the other hand, it may only be sucked into the general disaster. In this case,

Comment on Rundle's action.

whatever might have been the issue, there can scarcely be a question that the best traditions of the army demanded at least an attempt at rescue. No arguments for inactivity—risk to the troops engaged, risk to a few blockhouses—should have weighed for a moment against the great moral end of showing de Wet that he could not cut out a British force and decamp with its guns, men and stores without interruption from supports only three miles distant.

Causes of the reverse.

The immediate cause of the reverse, neglect of proper military precautions for the defence of the camp, is obvious and admits of no excuse. If we go further back, bad intelligence and the vicious dispersion of forces are clear secondary causes. A deeper fault still was the same that had characterised the campaign against Botha on the frontier of Natal, the inability of the army not only to grapple with, but even to keep touch with a Boer force. If Rundle's intelligence was bad, he might justly complain that, whereas he had only 500 available mounted men directly under his orders, a concourse of strong columns had been chasing de Wet for a month and had permitted him to disappear. Nor was this all. Kitchener's attitude towards the head of the district leaves something to be desired. Though Rundle had served with credit in the earlier stages of the campaign and had been duly rewarded, he had not shown an aptitude for guerilla war and, like many other senior men, he had lost in energy under the strain and tedium of a long campaign. Kitchener recognised his limitations, doled out troops to him sparingly, denied him the control of the one mobile column in his district, but retained him in the command of a very important region, the great stronghold of the Eastern Free State. Rundle was in a false position. If he did not make the most of the resources at his disposal, this should have been the ground for his transference to other work. Continually urged to make more of those scanty resources, he finally leapt from over-caution to carelessness.*

On the morrow of Tweefontein the ignorance as to de

* Two battalions of infantry were now sent to Rundle, to aid in the work on the blockhouse line, and a mobile column under Colonel Dawkins was sent down from the Northern Transvaal to Harrismith.

Wet's movements was as profound as before the disaster happened. For three days Rundle's intelligence reported that he was still behind the Langberg, but on the 28th these reports were falsified by news from the north. De Wet had left the Langberg on the evening of the 25th and had marched north to Reitz. On the morning of the 26th he dismissed the prisoners, some of whom were allowed to make their way to Bethlehem, while the rest were escorted all the way to Basutoland and there released in a miserable state of destitution. De Wet himself left the force on the 26th in order to report to Steyn, and handed over the temporary command to Michal Prinsloo, with orders to march towards the country between Reitz and Heilbron and to evade all contact. When close to Reitz, on the 28th, Prinsloo heard of the approach of a British column on his left flank. This was Elliot's force, which had left Lindley on the 26th with orders to march on Reitz. It had been reorganised in two columns under De Lisle and Major Fanshawe; the former having the 6th M.I. and three regiments of Dragoon Guards (1st, 3rd and 7th), the latter having the 4th and 12th Battalions of Yeomanry and a regiment of South Australians. On the 28th, Elliot, with 2,000 mounted men, passed the Liebenberg's Vlei at Fanny's Home Drift and a few hours later sighted Prinsloo's rearguard hastening northward to cross the river at Armstrong Drift. At sundown, after a rapid pursuit. Elliot was brought to a stand at the drift, on whose north bank Prinsloo had taken up a strong position. Some interest attaches to this occasion, because it was the last on which a Free State force 1,000 strong faced a British force in the field. For once, moreover, the Boers had guns and a considerable convoy, the plunder of Tweefontein. Travelling light, with a fine representative mounted force of cavalry, British and Colonial M.I. and Yeomanry, Elliot, with an hour or two more daylight, would have had a matchless opportunity for bringing to book the flower of the Free State Boers. But the drift was commanded by fire from the Boer guns and darkness fell on an indecisive combat. In the night Prinsloo stole away, and at dawn, when the British broke camp, he was ten miles off to the westward. Again Elliot pursued, sighting the

De Wet pursued by Elliot, Dec. 26–28.

Action of Armstrong Drift, Dec. 28.

Boer tail at Eland's Kop in the evening; but at dawn on the 30th the scent was wholly lost. Prinsloo, who had now been rejoined by de Wet, doubled to the east, and Elliot marched in to Lindley, where he replenished his supplies. Striking out to the eastward again on January 1, this time strengthened by Byng's column, he penetrated as far as the Wilge River, and, finding nothing, returned.

De Wet disperses his force, end of 1901.

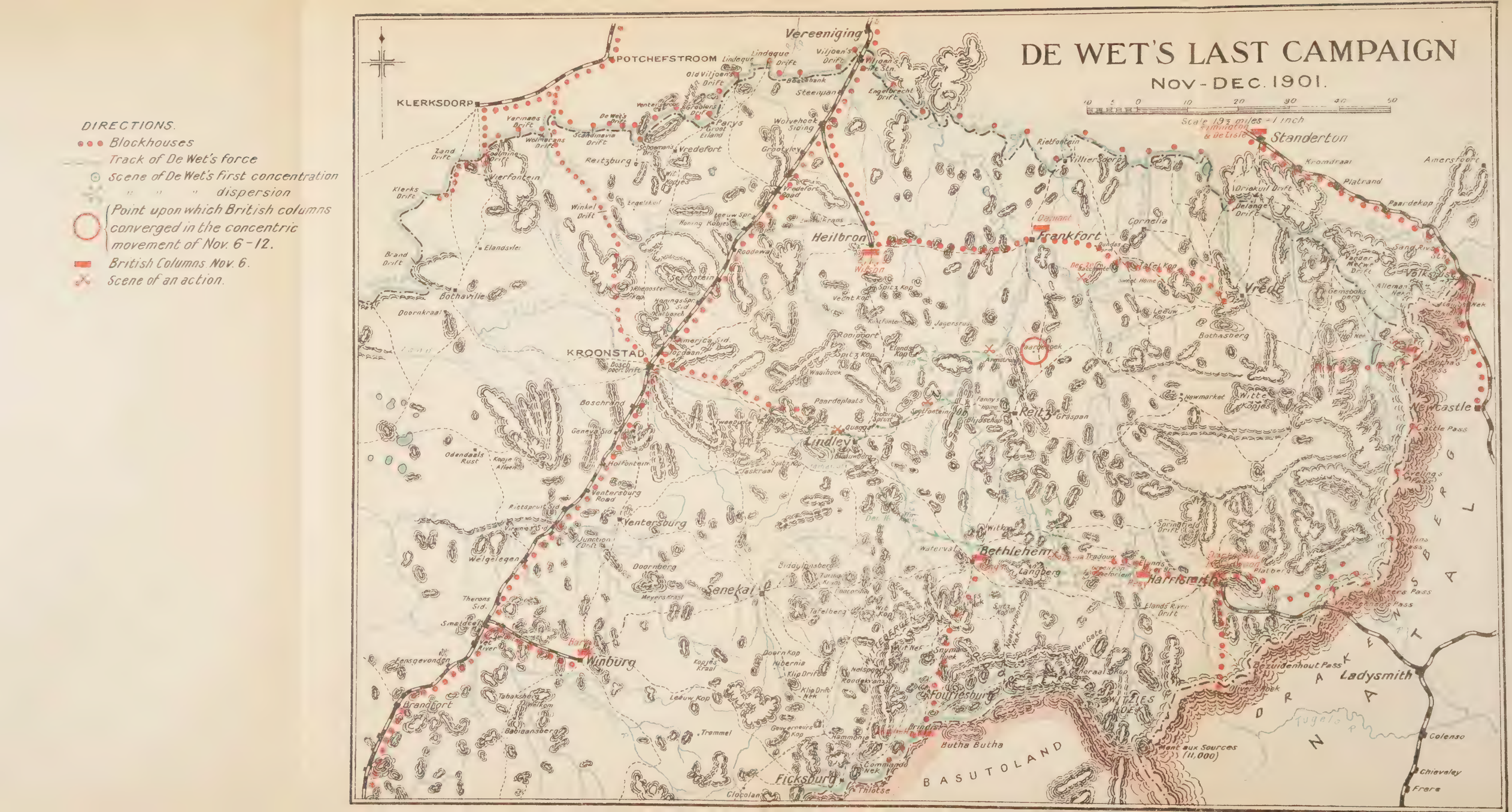
De Wet now broke up his force and dispersed his burghers to their several districts. The only detachment left in being was that of Mears and the Transvaalers, who were entrusted with the captured guns and were sent to the Wilge River.

The end of an era.

The operations described in this chapter may be said to mark the final failure of the standard British methods. To have proceeded on the same lines would have been to permit an indefinite extension of the war. The waste of energy had been enormous. If the reader will reckon up the troops and horses employed and the distances covered by the columns in the North-eastern Free State during the last two months of 1901; if he will consider the fruit of their labours, which, if we except the deaths of Haasbroek and Olivier and the burghers slain at Tweefontein, was represented only by driblets of killed, wounded and prisoners and by damage to crops and stock; if he will then reflect that de Wet, having concentrated undisturbed in the midst of these movements, scarcely moved outside the small triangle, Lindley-Reitz-Tweefontein, thus husbanding his men, horses and ammunition; if the reader will make this comparison, he will understand how it was that British leaders and their troops, under the incessant strain of ineffectual marching, were liable to lose ardour and tackling power, while the supply of horses was never equal to the demand; and how it was that the Boers, in the forlorn condition of their country, retained the power to deliver such strokes as at Tafel Kop and Tweefontein.

Prospect of a new era.

The game, however, was now to be varied to de Wet's disadvantage. But before describing the new methods inspired by the rapid progress of the blockhouse system, we must cast our eyes to the north of the Vaal and recount Bruce Hamilton's campaign in the Eastern Transvaal.


DE WET'S LAST CAMPAIGN
NOV-DEC. 1901.
Scale 19⅞ miles = 1 inch
DIRECTIONS.
Blockhouses
Track of De Wet's force
Scene of De Wet's first concentration
" " " dispersion
Point upon which British columns converged in the concentric movement of Nov. 6-12.
British Columns Nov. 6.
Scene of an action.
Vereeniging
POTCHEFSTROOM
KLERKSDORP
Standerton
Heilbron
Frankfort
Vrede
KROONSTAD
Lindley
Reitz
Bethlehem
Harrismith
Ventersburg
Winburg
Senekal
Fouriesburg
Ficksburg
Ladysmith
Newcastle
Bothaville
Bethasberg
BASUTOLAND
DRAKENSBERG

CHAPTER XVI

NIGHT RAIDS IN THE EASTERN TRANSVAAL

(November 1901–March 1902)

I

Operations against Louis Botha and the High Veld Commandos

In the middle of November, within a fortnight of the reverse at Bakenlaagte, Kitchener had collected twelve columns, representing some 15,000 men, to deal with Botha and the high veld commandos. The nucleus of the force was a group of four columns, under the immediate command of General Bruce Hamilton. These were Benson's column, reorganised at Brugspruit under Colonel Campbell Mackenzie, the columns of Allenby * and W. P. Campbell, set free by the termination of the Natal campaign and now at Standerton, and the small force, under Colonel Barter,† which for some time past had been guarding the Wilge River line of Constabulary posts. It should be added that shortly afterwards, on Campbell's departure to England, his column was split into two, under Colonels Wing ‡ and Simpson, the former taking the 19th, the latter the 18th Hussars. Besides this nucleus there were eight other columns, which, when occasion required, were to co-operate with Hamilton. Spens, at the conclusion of the Paardehoek movement, described in

The force collected in the Eastern Transvaal, Nov. 1901.

Map, p. 464.

* Allenby's column—Scots Greys, 480; Carabiniers, 550; "O" Batt. R.H.A., four guns, one pom-pom (E Sect.).

† Barter's Column—11th M.I.; 2nd Batt. K.O.Y.L.I.; one pom-pom, two guns.

‡ Wing's Column—19th Hussars; West Aust. M.I.; three cos. Durham L.I.; 83rd Batt. R.F.A.; two guns, 1 pom-pom.

the last chapter, was sent to Standerton. Rawlinson, with his strong column of M.I., Colonials and Yeomanry, and Stewart, with the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, were at Volksrust. Further still to the south-east, Colville was at Piet Retief, while Plumer with his Australians and Pulteney with his cavalry and M.I., were near Wakkerstroom. In the north, the columns of Ingouville-Williams and Fortescue, which had been operating against Muller, were brought in to Middelburg, and a new column of M.I. and infantry * was formed at the same place, under Colonel Urmston of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

The night raid policy.

Sweeping movements, so futile in the Free State, were equally futile in the Transvaal. On the other hand, the success which had attended Benson's night raids, but which had been brought to a melancholy and abrupt end at Bakenlaagte, pointed to the continuance, on a more systematic basis, of these tactics. Bruce Hamilton was instructed in this sense, and Colonel Woolls-Sampson, on whose system of local intelligence Benson's tactics were founded, joined him as intelligence officer.

Preliminary sweeping movement planned.

At first, however, an effort was made to prepare the ground by a great sweeping movement from west to east. The natural starting-point was the cordon of Constabulary posts, then stretching from Wilge River Station on the Delagoa Railway, through Greylingstad, to the Natal Railway and the Vaal; and the preliminary object of the movement was to cover the transference of this cordon to the line Brugspruit-Waterval, fifteen miles further to the east. From that line onward, the idea was to break up the concentration which had fought at Bakenlaagte, to force the commandos eastward through the Bethal, Ermelo and Carolina districts and to pen them up against the Swazi border. This was exactly what French had vainly tried to do ten months before; but lapse of time had given Bruce Hamilton certain pronounced advantages. His troops were far superior in mobility and efficiency to those of French; he had not to mingle pursuit with deportation and devastation; and,

* Urmston's Column—18th M.I., three companies; 19th M.I., two companies; Royal Scots, 500; 81st Battery R.F.A., two guns.

lastly, he derived help from blockhouse lines. One of these, the Wakkerstroom-Piet Retief line, sealed that outlet to the south-east which had been open in French's day, and, more important still, enabled the columns of Plumer, Pulteney and Colville to maintain themselves in the field at that point; another, the Standerton-Ermelo line, incomplete as it still was, already simplified the transport problem.

Botha and the Government, early November.

Like de Wet after Tweefontein, Botha after Bakenlaagte pursued the usual guerilla tactics. He knew that an army would appear on the scene to avenge the reverse, and his screen of pickets along both railways gave him timely warning of the various points of concentration. To make any formal stand was out of the question. He had to evade by means of dispersion, and at the same time to retain such control as would enable him, if a chance offered, to fall with superior force upon an isolated detachment. He, too, was better off than in February; for there was now no non-combatant exodus to obstruct his movements. On the other hand, the spirit of his burghers, in spite of the victory at Bakenlaagte, was none too high. Elation was tempered by gloom at the prospect of reprisals and the tiresome necessity of evading them. Of the force which had fought against Benson, Botha, soon after the action, withdrew that portion which had accompanied him from Natal and whose intervention had decided the day, and sent them to their farms for a rest. These men were drawn from the Ermelo, Bethal and Carolina commandos and the Swaziland police. Grobler's contingent of Heidelberg, Pretoria, Bethal and South Middelburg men, together with the two captured guns, the whole now placed under General Piet Viljoen, remained in the Bethal district. On November 16, when Bruce Hamilton launched his eastward movement, they were at Vaalkop, eighteen miles north of Bethal, awaiting the British approach. The Transvaal Government party, on the same date, was at Tafel Kop, a few miles east of Ermelo, where, three days before, they had met Botha and had received the details of Bakenlaagte. Otherwise Botha's news was not exhilarating. Retribution, it appeared, was already at hand. One column (Colonel Fortescue's) had already left the Delagoa line, and

Map of Government track, end of Chapter XX.

others were known to be marching. To make the situation clearer still, an intercepted dispatch from Bruce Hamilton had just been brought in, from which it appeared that a combined advance against Ermelo was about to begin. Several junior leaders being present, an informal council of war was held, at which the idea was broached that the commandos, if they found it impossible to break back through the British line, should cross the Delagoa Railway and take refuge *en masse* in the north-eastern district, where food was still plentiful and pursuit difficult. Although this plan was rejected, it was decided that the Government, at any rate, must take that line of flight.

Bruce Hamilton's march on Ermelo, Nov. 16–Dec. 3.

By November 16 Bruce Hamilton had stationed eight columns on the Wilge River and on the same day, under cover of Hamilton's advance, the Constabulary posts were smoothly transferred to the line Brugspruit-Waterval. On the 22nd, the columns having reached the meridian of Bethal, an effort was made with a picked mounted force to strike at Piet Viljoen, who was still near Vaalkop. The Boers were on their guard, however, and retired to the east, watching for a chance of breaking back. Hamilton now planned an enveloping movement on Ermelo similar to that of French in February. The wings were thrown far forward; Fortescue, Williams and Mackenzie on the left, reaching Carolina on December 1, and Rawlinson and Spens on the right, taking post to the south-west and south of Ermelo, at Klipfontein and Beginderlyn, on the same day. Campbell and Allenby formed the centre. An intrenched camp having been formed at Bethal, in charge of Barter, the columns converged upon Ermelo on December 3, but, like French, found nothing within the net.

Flight of the Government, Nov. 23–Dec. 5.

The Transvaal Government, travelling north, had resumed its vagabond career on November 23. At dawn on the 26th, accompanied thus far by Louis Botha himself, it reached Twyfelaar (5 miles north-east of Carolina), and was there joined by 200 Carolina men under Commandant David Joubert, who had been summoned to strengthen the Government escort for the dangerous passage of the railway. Since the columns of Hamilton's left wing were all in the near

neighbourhood, great caution was needed. After an ingenious double to the south-east, Joubert darted back to the north and, passing round the British left, reached the farm Bloemfontein, near Dalmanutha Station, at 2 A.M. on December 2. That day was spent in feints. At 1.30 A.M. on the 3rd a dash was made for the railway; the wires were cut under a hot fire from the blockhouses and the whole party, with a loss of ten horses and two men wounded, crossed the line. The Government officials now returned to the Roos Senekal district, from which, eight months before, they had been expelled by Blood. For several weeks, broken by intervals of flight, they occupied the same farm, Paardeplaats, on the summit of the Tautesberg, which had been their home for nearly six months.

Botha breaks back through the British line, Dec. 3.

Having arranged for the safety of the Government, Botha, whose personal activity at this period was extraordinary, hurried back from Twyfelaar to Ermelo. Piet Viljoen, who had retired slowly to the east, was ordered to break back to the north-west, and Botha, with 600 men (portions of the Ermelo, Wakkerstroom, Swaziland and Carolina commandos), led a similar manœuvre to the south-west. Both movements were carried out on December 3, the culminating day of the British march on Ermelo, but not with equal success. Piet Viljoen, who was at Smutsoog, twenty miles north of Ermelo, darted back between Williams and Allenby, losing 17 men and 20 wagons to the former officer, and settled down in his old haunts north of Bethal. Botha was less fortunate. He made his point, surely enough, between Spens and Campbell, and on the night of the 3rd laagered in fancied security at Oshoek, twenty miles west of Ermelo. But Hamilton had heard of the movement, and with the aid of Woolls-Sampson directed upon the Boer laager the first and one of the most successful of his night raids. Since the tactics employed in all these raids were much the same, it will be convenient at this point to give some general account of them.

The first night raid, Dec. 4.

The night-raid system.

The system depended partly on Boer "guides," but mainly on information gained from the Kaffirs. A surrendered Boer named Lange, who acted as Sampson's head man, besides controlling a number of skilled guides, had an

agent in nearly every Kaffir kraal. In order to communicate with these agents Sampson had collected fifteen picked native scouts of tried boldness and cunning. Provided with the best mounts procurable, several of these natives used to ride out in different directions every evening, visit the native kraals and pick up information. In the morning they returned and reported to Sampson, who thereupon, in concert with Hamilton, selected a point for attack. The troops employed were the "A" divisions of three or four columns, that is to say, 400 or 500 of the best mounted men from each, amounting generally to 1,500 or 2,000 rifles in all.* A couple of guns were sometimes taken, and some ambulance carts, but no transport. The troops rendezvoused with all secrecy at nightfall and marched off in close order, disposed as follows:—First the general and staff; then a single squadron of the leading column; then the guns—if guns were taken—in column of route, closely flanked, in order to deaden the sound of the wheels, by the remaining squadrons of the leading column; lastly, the other columns, marching in column of troops. Meanwhile the Kaffir scouts rode out wide on the flanks, bringing in hourly news. Twenty, thirty, and even forty miles would be covered thus in the hours of darkness, but in every case the march was timed to terminate just before dawn. Arrived at the correct point, the force was deployed quickly, though without hurry, on a broad front, and at dawn the whole line galloped in and rushed the Boer camp.

Its results.

No absolutely complete success was ever gained by these methods. Though a defence of the laager or of the farm where the Boers were sleeping was very rarely attempted, about two-thirds of the burghers present generally managed to escape. But in every laager at this period there were burghers without horses, and these, together with men who could not reach their mounts in time, succumbed to the raid. Sometimes mist or some minute error in the intelligence

* Every column under Bruce Hamilton's orders was divided into A, B, and C divisions. "A" division comprised the best and freshest horses and was ready for long expeditions at an instant's notice. "B" division, mounted on the less serviceable horses, guarded the second line mule-transport. "C" division was composed of dismounted troopers or infantry, and guarded the ox-transport.

wrecked the whole expedition, while the Boers, on their side, grew more and more wary. Nevertheless, compared with the orthodox operations by daylight, the system was highly successful. The troops, enjoying the game, hard as it was, worked with the utmost keenness and dash. Bruce Hamilton accounted for 690 Boers in six weeks, and the moral effect on the enemy, due to the constant strain and unrest caused by the night-raid tactics, was even more important. Accustomed as they had been to long periods of rest, varied by sharp spurts of activity, the new methods brought home to the Boers in a way that Benson's tactics only had succeeded in doing before, the relentless purpose of the British and the futility of resistance. Hamilton's resources, it must not be overlooked, were vastly superior to Benson's. His mounted troops, by comparison with the eight or nine hundred men which Benson possessed, were almost unlimited, so that he was able to select for every raid fresh troops of a strength three or four times superior to the Boer force aimed at. An even greater advantage was the possession of a base in the heart of the enemy's country. Whereas Benson's huge perambulating convoy had ultimately proved his ruin, when Hamilton began his raiding campaign in earnest, Ermelo, the strategical centre of the high-veld and the ganglion of all the main roads, was connected with Standerton and the Natal railway by a blockhouse line, and could thus be used as a permanent base. The corresponding section between Ermelo, Carolina and the Delagoa Railway was completed six weeks later. This comparison of resources, while it detracts nothing from the credit due to Hamilton, throws into interesting relief the risks and difficulties which Benson had to encounter.

Botha rallies, Dec. 4–6.

The surprise at Oshoek, carried out in dashing style at dawn on December 4 by Rawlinson's mounted men and a part of Spens's column under Colonel Jenner, produced about 100 prisoners and much material. Botha, however, rallied his force successfully and doubled to the south-east, crossing the upper Vaal. In this direction he found the road barred by Pulteney and Plumer, the former with 750 cavalry and M.I. (8th Hussars, Scottish Rifles M.I.,

Victorian M.R.), the latter with 1,000 Australians and some Yeomanry and M.I., divided, as of old, into two corps under Colonels Colvin and Sir John Jervis. Contact was gained on December 6 at Kalkoenskraal, but over-dispersion at the important moment prevented Plumer from closing. Indeed, it was as much as he could do to save his advance-guard of Queenslanders from being overwhelmed. Although they were extricated by Colvin's corps, Pulteney and the rest of the force were on the spot too late to carry out a counter-stroke. On the next day 200 of the Boers broke past the columns and gained the Elandsberg, while Botha and the rest fell back on the upper Vaal.

Action of Kalkoenskraal, Dec. 6.

Before turning in Botha's direction, Bruce Hamilton, based on Ermelo, aimed a blow at Piet Viljoen, who, as we have seen, had broken back to the Bethal district. At dawn on the 10th, Wing, Rawlinson and Ingouville-Williams, with a force 2,000 strong, swooped down upon the Boer laager at Trigaardtsfontein. 131 prisoners and a quantity of material were the reward of this, the most brilliant of all the raids. Three days later, when Viljoen had rallied at Witkrans, another *coup* was executed. Hamilton, leading the same troops, pounced on the laager afresh, killed 16 Boers, captured 70, and retook one of the guns lost at Bakenlaagte. The other had already been abandoned and was found at a later date. Scotched, but not killed, Piet Viljoen once more broke to the west, set up his headquarters at his old centre, Vaalkop, and this time succeeded in throwing 300 men under Duvenhage and Joachim Prinsloo over the line of Constabulary posts where they established themselves firmly in the area hitherto known as "protected." As we shall see, he joined them later with his main body and gave an immense amount of trouble.

Night raids against Piet Viljoen, Dec. 10–13.

Bruce Hamilton now turned his attention to the forces east of Ermelo. The original strategical idea of penning the Boers against the Swazi border still held the field. Mackenzie, descending from Carolina, was to bar the north. Plumer, Pulteney, Spens and Colville, based on Wakkerstroom and the blockhouse line, were to bar the south and, if possible, to force the Boers north. Hamilton, with the

Further night raids, Dec. 20, 1901–Jan. 4, 1902.

main body, was to raid in the country due east of Ermelo. The campaign of the next three weeks took a chequered course. Hamilton's raids, though they lost somewhat in efficacy owing to the redoubled wariness of the Boers and the precautions enjoined by Botha, were nevertheless very fairly productive. Between December 20 and January 4, in the course of two expeditions to the Swazi border with 2,300 men under Rawlinson, Wing, Williams and Simpson, four successful raids were made, two in succession upon a laager at Maryvale and two others upon Bankkop and Glen Eland, 106 prisoners forming the total result. During the same period Mackenzie and Fortescue, moving south from Carolina on December 19, carried out two raids on small laagers at Lake Banagher and Klipstapel.

Action of Holland, Dec. 19.

On the other hand, the southern columns, which were engaged for the most part in ordinary daylight operations, found the enemy as skilful as ever. Without leaving the threatened area, Botha, with Opperman and Britz as his principal lieutenants, managed to inflict some annoying blows on the superior forces which faced him. We left him on the upper Vaal (about Beginderlyn) on December 7 after the ineffectual brush with Plumer and Pulteney. These two officers had retired towards Wakkerstroom, partly to reprovision and partly to scour the Elandsberg, whither, it will be remembered, a portion of Botha's force had taken refuge. Here they operated for more than a fortnight without much result. In the meantime Spens, who was watching the Standerton-Ermelo blockhouse line, had suffered a sharp reverse. On December 18 Major Bridgford, with 214 men of the 14th M.I., was sent out by night to search the farms of Holland, which border the Vaal near its junction with the Kaffir Spruit. At dawn on the 19th, Britz, sallying out from Beginderlyn, sent forward decoys who enticed the M.I. in the direction of the river, where they suddenly found themselves surrounded by more than 400 Boers. Many were dressed in khaki and were consequently mistaken at first for Plumer's men, whose co-operation Bridgford had been led to expect. There was a rout, in which 63 men under Lieutenant Stirling succeeded in fighting their way back to the

blockhouse line, while the rest were left on the field. Nearly a hundred were taken prisoners. Three officers, one of whom—Lieutenant Moeller—showed conspicuous gallantry, were killed, 4 were wounded, and there were 11 killed and 17 wounded among the rank and file.

Britz escapes from Plumer, Dec. 23–28.

On the 23rd, Pulteney and Plumer, who had been called up in support, met Chris Botha and some 400 Boers at Glenfillan, among the northern foot-hills of the Randberg. The Boers fought a hard running rearguard action all day and got clear with little loss in the evening. But Britz and his men, who had not been present at this action, were surrounded three days later by the same two columns and by Spens. Dropping 31 men, who were taken prisoners, Britz adroitly wriggled out of the cordon on December 28, splitting his force into two bodies, one of which crossed the Natal Railway at Platrand and sought temporary sanctuary in the Free State, while the other regained touch with Botha on the upper Vaal.

Action of Bankkop, Jan. 4, 1902.

Botha now had under his hand some 750 men. With a view of pressing this force back upon Bruce Hamilton's main body, which at this moment was near the Swazi border, the three columns marched in line to the north-east on January 1. Spens, on the 2nd, was ordered to remain at Beginderlyn; but Plumer and Pulteney proceeded, and on the 3rd camped at the farm Rotterdam. On this day, as on December 6, Plumer's advance guard was allowed to get adrift and to stray into the arms of one of the Boer commandos. Before supports could arrive, 28 New Zealanders were captured, in addition to a few casualties. A mishap, similar in kind but more serious in degree, happened in the course of the following day, when the columns continued the advance. Plumer's column, it will be remembered, was divided into two corps, under Colvin and Sir John Jervis. Quite recently Jervis had been transferred to a command in the Free State and had been succeeded by Major Vallentin, of the Somerset L.I., an officer of proved gallantry and capacity. On January 4, Vallentin's corps, consisting of 110 men of the 5th Queensland Imperial Bushmen, the 19th Company of Yeomanry, the Buffs and Hampshire companies of Mounted

Infantry and a pom-pom, was acting as "advance patrol" to the joint columns of Plumer and Pulteney. On reaching the extensive plateau which crowns the hill or group of hills known as Bankkop, Vallentin left the Buffs M.I. to hold the hither edge of the plateau until the columns should come up, and pushed on for another mile with the rest of his command. Then he called a halt, disposing his Queenslanders in a semi-circular screen, with his Yeomanry and pom-pom in the centre and, at some distance in rear, as a small support, the Hampshire M.I., only 25 strong. Shortly after halting, Vallentin descried some 50 Boers on the right flank, and, under circumstances somewhat similar to those of Gough at Blood River Poort, formed the impetuous decision to gallop them down with a portion of his troops, but without certain knowledge of the ground before him and without making sure that the whole of his screen changed front and conformed to the movement. The charge had scarcely begun when the original group of Boers, which was only a decoy, was swelled by a compact body of 300 under Opperman, who charged down with great vehemence from the right flank, drove back Vallentin's men and succeeded in routing the major part of the screen. When affairs were at their worst, the small reserve of Hampshire M.I., reduced to only 16 men by the previous dispatch of a patrol, was brought up in the most gallant fashion by Captain Leigh and Lieutenant Barlow and under Vallentin's directions took post on a small ridge, where they were joined by Major Toll and some Queenslanders. Here a desperate stand was made against overwhelming odds. Leigh and Toll were wounded and all but four of this brave little party were struck down before the Boers were able to seize the ridge. The pom-pom, too, was defended with great devotion by a few Queenslanders under Captain Carter and Lieutenant Higginson. Although both these officers and six men were wounded, and two sergeants, Goodall and Power, were killed, the gun was eventually retired to the shelter of a small donga. In the meantime Vallentin and his staff had been making great efforts to rally the rest of the force; but the Boers, who had now been reinforced to the number

of 500, pressed their advantage vigorously and in little more than twenty minutes from the first attack were masters of the field. Vallentin, striving to the last to avert defeat, was killed, together with 19 men; while 6 officers and 39 men were wounded, and about 70 taken prisoners. If the Boer loss, numerically, was slight, there was among the dead one whose loss was deeply felt, Commandant Opperman, one of the bravest and staunchest of Botha's lieutenants. The Boers just had time to gather up their spoil, in the shape of rifles, horses and equipment, when Colvin's corps, accompanied by Plumer himself, appeared on the scene, having ridden up in support with admirable promptitude. The Boers decamped instantly and were pursued for some distance, though without success. Vallentin was succeeded in the command of the corps by Colonel Vialls.

Further night raids, January.

With this incident the combined operations east of Ermelo came to an end for three weeks. Bruce Hamilton returned to Ermelo and took Spens's column in exchange for Rawlinson's, which was sent to the Free State. Mackenzie fell back on Carolina; Pulteney and Plumer on Wakkerstroom. During these three weeks Hamilton's columns made five successful night raids * from Ermelo, principally to the north and west, producing altogether about 40 killed and wounded and some 200 unwounded prisoners. The laager of the Staats Artillerie twice suffered severely, Major Wolmarans and Captain Wolmarans being taken on January 11 and Captain De Jager on January 26. Upon this last occasion 86 prisoners were taken and 6 Boers killed.

A stale-mate.

At the end of January the old strategy was repeated. Hamilton moved out once more to the Swazi border, while Mackenzie watched the north and Pulteney, Plumer and Colville lined out between Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief. These latter columns, in a well-managed mountain-drive on January 25, to the north-east of Wakkerstroom, took 34 prisoners and forced 30 burghers towards the blockhouse

* (1) Jan. 11, Witbank (22 miles N.W. of Ermelo), 42 prisoners. (2) Jan. 12, Kaffirstad, near Witbank, 32 prisoners. (3) Jan. 18, Spitzkop (26 miles S.E. of Ermelo), 27 prisoners. (4) Jan. 24, Boschmansfontein, 12 prisoners. (5) Jan. 26, Nelspan (15 miles W. of Ermelo), 86 prisoners.

line, where they were seized by the West Yorks Regiment. Hamilton and Mackenzie found that they could effect nothing. All that could be accomplished by night-raiding had been accomplished. So shy and scattered had the surviving laagers become, that none of any size could be located. Although Botha and some 600 of the staunchest irreconcilables of the Eastern Transvaal remained within the circle, to outmanœuvre and surround them by the ordinary daylight methods was recognised to be hopeless and was scarcely attempted. On his side, Botha realised that the restricted area in which he had moved for so long could no longer support his troops. He resolved, therefore, in the middle of February, to evade the southern cordon and gain the Vryheid district. The truth was, that he had no longer any motive for clinging to the high veld. Tirelessly as he had striven to encourage his commandos, he was aware that he had shot his bolt; that his authority, if still sufficient to keep his men in the field, was insufficient to secure concerted action. Memorials were reaching him frequently, begging him either to end the war or to give some good reason for keeping the burghers in the field. It was a hard dilemma. The soundest reason there had ever been was the hope either of foreign intervention or of a paralysis of will in the nation he was fighting. But Europe showed no sign of stirring, and Britain obviously was as resolute as ever.

Botha deserts the high veld, mid-February.

Nor was it only a question of authority. To exercise firm and continuous control over the Eastern Transvaal was no longer physically possible. Ermelo, Bethal and Carolina, the three principal centres, were irrevocably lost; the blockhouse line, now complete from Standerton to Wonderfontein, cut the high veld into two. Piet Viljoen, who had managed to keep intact a force in the west, was beyond effective reach, and, for the rest, was quite capable of looking after himself. Botha, personally, had not given up hope. Tweefontein had shot a glimmer of light over the dark horizon, and the reprisals, which will be described in the next chapter, though just begun, had not reached his ears. De la Rey he knew to be still strong; Cape Colony always offered elusive hopes. But in marching south, though he had vague notions, no

doubt, of joining the Free Staters or of attempting another raid on Zululand and Natal, his immediate motive was merely that of giving rest and recuperation to his burghers in a district at present free from the enemy. The blockhouse line was no serious obstacle. On February 13, accompanied by some 500 men, he evaded it by taking a short circuit through Swaziland and thence marched to the mountains east of Vryheid. It was ten days before his flight was definitely known to Kitchener, and twelve days before Bruce Hamilton was sent in pursuit. Since March was half through before contact was gained, we must break off the narrative here, only remarking in general terms that Botha and his stalwarts were never caught.

II

Piet Viljoen, Ben Viljoen, and the Transvaal Government

Three concluding topics.

BEFORE closing this chapter we must deal with three topics: Piet Viljoen's doings in the west, and the closely connected fortunes of the Government and of General Ben Viljoen in the north-east.

Piet Viljoen enters the protected area, Jan. 24, 1902.

Recovering from two slashing night raids in the middle of December, Piet Viljoen, as we have related, had settled down at Vaalkop, north of Bethal, and had succeeded in throwing an advanced party of 200 men into the "protected" area in rear of the line of Constabulary posts. He now had a breathing-space in which to consider his next course of action. One thing was clear, that the ravaged and impoverished Bethal district could not support even a moderate concentration. To follow Prinsloo and Duvenhage into the protected area, to join Ben Viljoen in the north-east or de Wet in the Free State—all these plans were considered and laid before the subordinate commandants, Hendrik Grobler of Bethal, Piet Trichard of South Middelburg, Van Niekerk of Germiston, W. Pretorius of Pretoria and other minor leaders at a council of war held on January 7 at Vrischgewaagd. Jack Hindon, the famous train-wrecker, also came from the north to attend the meeting. Migration to the Free State

was scouted; migration to the north-east found a good deal of favour, but was ultimately discarded; and a decision was reached to pierce the line of posts and gain the "protected" area. Submitted subsequently to the commandos, this decision was accepted by some and rejected by others. Most of the Bethal and all the South Middelburg men elected to remain near Bethal, while the Pretoria, Heidelberg and Germiston commandos and a fraction of the Bethal men, about 400 rifles all told, agreed to follow the General to the west. For more than a fortnight, owing to the flooded condition of the Olifant's River and Steenkool Spruit, whose best drifts were held by the Constabulary, the movement hung fire. At length on the night of January 24, the rivers having fallen, the force safely penetrated the line of posts and by the end of the month had effected a junction with Prinsloo in the Wilge River valley.

Gilbert Hamilton's operations in the protected area, Dec. 1901–Feb. 1902.

Soon after Prinsloo's first incursion, Kitchener had endeavoured to oust him from the protected area. The work was entrusted to Brig.-General Gilbert Hamilton, who was given Barter's small column and a fine force of cavalry, consisting of the 5th Dragoon Guards under Colonel Gore, the 13th Hussars under Colonel Smithson and the Scots Greys under Colonel Hippisley, together with a body of 200 National Scouts who proved to be of no fighting value. When Bruce Hamilton could spare them, Allenby and Wing occasionally co-operated. Barter, Gore and Smithson were each allotted districts in which to operate, and from time to time combinations were tried. On December 18 and January 5 small successes were gained, 33 prisoners being taken on the first occasion, and 11, including Commandant Breytenbach, on the second. On the other hand, the Scots Greys were hotly attacked by Prinsloo on December 31, and lost 5 killed and 13 wounded. After this came a long period of impotence; nor did Piet Viljoen's incursion on January 25 tend to improve matters. Intelligence was very poor, and the Brigadier, it would seem, had but an imperfect grip of the situation. We may pass over six weeks and come to February 15, when he left Bronkhorst Spruit Station leading 200 of the 5th Dragoon Guards, 200 of the Scots Greys and

Action of Klippan, Feb. 18.

two guns, with the object of marching to Springs, where he was expecting remounts and new drafts. At Rietkuil, twenty-eight miles south of the station, a heliogram was received from headquarters stating that 200 Boers on tired horses had crossed the Natal Railway from south to north at a point twenty miles east of Heidelberg, and urging Gilbert Hamilton to follow them. Hamilton, therefore, resolved on a southerly detour by Leeuwkop and Nigel. The Boers, however, took another direction, while Hamilton's march took him straight towards Piet Viljoen's main body of about 600 men. While he knew nothing of the presence of this Boer force, Viljoen, on his side, had read off the heliogram, which had not been transmitted in cipher, and was ready for Hamilton. Contact was gained at Klippan on February 18, when the scouts reported 300 Boers four miles to the front, of whom 60 were breaking away to the south. Viljoen, pursuing the tactics now so familiar, had unmasked the 60 as a decoy. Hamilton, without, we think, taking sufficient precautions to ensure prompt support, sent round two squadrons of Scots Greys under Major Feilden, one of which unhappily was surrounded and overwhelmed, Feilden being among the killed. Soon after this, the cavalry brigade was broken up and for more than a month the bands within the protected area enjoyed complete immunity. They did no harm, for there was nothing to harm, but merely trekked about from farm to farm, sometimes even approaching the neighbourhood of Pretoria, where food was more plentiful. Kitchener, whose hands were full elsewhere, let them alone till near the end of March, when, as will be seen in a later chapter, they still proved to be formidable.

Ben Viljoen and Muller in the north-east, latter part of 1901.

As we recorded in Chapter XIII., General Ben Viljoen and the commandos north of the Delagoa line had taken no part in the spring offensive revival. Their district was one of those which Kitchener thought safe to neglect, and with good reason, for the commandos were honeycombed with disaffection and Ben Viljoen's authority was insufficient to produce any serious concerted action. If let alone by columns and allowed to choose their own resorts, the burghers led a sufficiently comfortable life and waited philo-

See pp. 328 and 360.

sophically for the end. In September Viljoen and his lieutenant, Muller, who were not on the best of terms, made a rough division of their forces and settled down in different districts. Viljoen set up his headquarters at Pilgrim's Rest, a hamlet lying some twenty-five miles to the north-east of Lydenburg in a secluded little valley, protected on the south by the Mauchberg and on the east by outlying spurs of the Drakensberg. This became the permanent base of such troops as he could control. These were the Lydenburg commando of about 400 men, under Commandant David Schoeman and a corps of some 500 Johannesburgers, many of them foreigners, under his brother, Commandant W. Viljoen. Pilgrim's Rest had been occupied once by Buller in 1900, but after that date the sound of war never penetrated to the quiet valley. Now the village began to grow apace. Within easy reach of the rich Ohrigstad valley, it became the storehouse of large quantities of grain which was ground regularly in steam-mills. Families poured into it from ravaged districts; new streets of huts swelled the little township; marriages were celebrated, and the normal life of an orderly community maintained until the last day of the war. Near the village are the oldest goldfields in South Africa. While these were rigorously protected, gold enough was recovered from some alluvial diggings in the neighbourhood to warrant the establishment of a State mint, whence several hundred sovereigns were issued. Viljoen made periodical visits to Muller, to whom had been left the North Middelburg commando, under Commandant Stephanus Trichardt, and the Boksburg police. Muller was in the habit of camping on the Bothasberg, Tautesberg or Steenkampsberg, according to the abundance or scarcity of provisions. Fiery as ever, he was continually planning raids on the railway, but his men for the most part were apathetic and could only be induced by some strong aggression from without to strike with anything like their old vigour.

The settlement at Pilgrim's Rest.

Muller.

Besides these two main groups, there were other bands who paid no allegiance to any high authority. Jan Visagie, Piet Uys and Thys Pretorius, each leading a ward of the Pretoria District commando, roamed in the bush veld west

Other bands in the north-east.

of the Olifant's. Finally, there was Jack Hindon the train-wrecker, who, if he regarded any superior, had a sort of respect for Muller, but in practice was independent. With a following of about 150, he was generally to be found about twenty miles north of Balmoral. The blockhouse defences having effectually put an end to the game of train-wrecking, he had turned his attention to raiding cattle from the environs of the railway garrisons. Hindon often hatched hare-brained schemes, such as that of invading Cape Colony, but they never came to anything.

Park and Urmston hunt the Government, Dec. 18–21.

Between August and December 1901, the only British column permanently established north of the Delagoa line was that of Colonel Park, the officer in command at Lydenburg. Park was too weak to do more than watch the enemy, raid a small area and guard the road to Machadodorp. But in December, when the news reached Kitchener that the Transvaal Government, in the face of Bruce Hamilton's advance, had crossed the railway and gained the Roos Senekal district, he sent Colonel Urmston from Belfast to co-operate with Park in an attempt to capture the Government party. On December 18, when Park and Urmston started, the Government was at Windhoek, to the west of Dullstroom, which had been chosen as the point of junction for the two columns. Muller, however, was ready to give protection, and interposing at the right moment, attacked Park on the 19th at Elandspruit. He was repulsed, after several hours' fighting, in which the British had 37 casualties and the Boers 25. Under cover of the action the Government escaped, but three days later, while prosecuting the hunt, Park and Urmston fell on and captured Muller's wagons.

See pp. 450, 451.

Ben Viljoen visits the Government, Jan. 16–21.

During their subsequent stay in the Roos Senekal district, Schalk Burger and his colleagues received urgent invitations from Ben Viljoen to take up their quarters at Pilgrim's Rest, where, with athletic sports, magic-lantern shows, dancing and other festivities, a tranquil and even mirthful Christmas had been celebrated. A perfunctory effort to signalize the New Year by some more martial enterprise had led to a night attack on Lydenburg, which fizzled out round the first blockhouse assailed. On January 16, in order to press the invita-

DIRECTIONS

Blockhouses

S. A. C. Posts

Flight of Transvaal Govt

Scene of an action or night-raid.

SUMMER CAMPAIGN IN THE E. & N.E. TRANSVAAL

(Nov. 1901 - March 1902)

Scale 19½ miles = 1 inch

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

tion by personal argument, Ben Viljoen, with his four adjutants, Nel, Coetzee, Bester and Jordaan, set out to pay a visit to the Government, which they found at Mapoch's Gronden, a little to the south of Roos Senekal. In view of renewed attentions from Park and Urmston, the party this time were inclined to favour the journey to Pilgrim's Rest, and on the 21st set out in Viljoen's company to the farm Oshoek, between Dullstroom and Lydenburg. Here, however, the sight of the blockhouses and barbed wire which they had to pass discouraged them so much that—wisely as it proved—they turned back. Viljoen and his adjutants proceeded on the 25th, forded the Spekboom River and approached Lydenburg. Soon after midnight, in the bed of a deep spruit, shots rang out and a line of British soldiery started out of the darkness. Spies had betrayed Viljoen, and three companies of the Royal Irish Regiment had been sent out from Lydenburg to lay ambuscades in his path. It was "A" company, under Major Orr, which was clever enough to effect the capture. Nel and Jordaan were killed in the first volley; Viljoen himself was captured unhurt and sent to St. Helena. His loss, though it caused some temporary depression, had no military effect. Under his younger brother, W. Viljoen, the commandos of the north-east carried on the same policy of semi-passive resistance.

Capture of Ben Viljoen, Jan. 25.

In February, the lull in the high veld allowed Kitchener to take more strenuous measures with the north-east. On the 20th Ingouville-Williams, Park and Urmston, under the general control of Park, converged, after a long night march, upon the Bothasberg. With the object of screening the Government, Muller's laagers were disposed along this range and in stronger force than usual. Two of them, by dint of smart and punctual co-operation on the part of the British columns, were thoroughly surprised and lost no less than 164 prisoners, including Field-Cornets Du Toit, Joubert and de Jager. It was mainly due to the assistance of a strong wing of National Scouts that these captures were effected.

Park's raid on Muller, Feb. 2.

The Government, however, had already taken alarm and was hurrying westward to the Olifant's River. Crossing it on February 12, near its junction with the Wilge, they

The Government flies across the Olifant's, Feb. 12–March 1.

entered the bush-veld and camped at the farm Langkloof. Apprised promptly of the movement, Kitchener launched Williams on the trail. But on the 18th, when Williams dropped on the farm, the birds had flown. Fully aware that their every movement was dogged by spies and reported, they had left Langkloof on the 17th for Stroomwater, a few miles further to the north. Circling through the bush for a few days after this, they returned on March 1 to Stroomwater. There, on the verge of an important decision, we must leave them.

Condition of the Eastern Transvaal, early March 1902.

In future chapters, save for one episode, we shall not have to recur in any detail to the Eastern Transvaal. We leave the country terribly impoverished and the commandos, under the resolute application of the night raid, seriously thinned, and what was more, deeply depressed. But in carrying the narrative up to the beginning of March 1902, we have somewhat anticipated the general current of events. It is necessary now to revert to the Free State, where struggles of a widely different character and of still greater significance had been raging for the last month.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEW MODEL DRIVE

(North-Eastern Free State, January–March, 1902)

I

Origin and Character of the new Driving System

The two British methods contrasted.

In returning to the Eastern Free State from the Eastern Transvaal, we see in sharp and vivid contrast the two military methods by which the war was brought to an end. It was the night raid which demoralised Botha's burghers. The drive, revolutionised in character, was now to have its turn against de Wet. A raid and a drive represented the opposite poles of military effort. The one depended upon exact intelligence, stratagem and enterprise; the other upon overwhelming numbers and scientific precision of movement. One condition, however—the establishment of advanced bases —was found to be essential to the success of both methods. Bruce Hamilton began his raiding campaign with Ermelo, Bethal, Carolina and Wakkerstroom as permanently held bases, and, as we have seen, it was the blockhouse lines which rendered possible the maintenance of such bases. In the Free State, as long as the railway towns were the only available depôts, the length and direction of drives were rigidly circumscribed. But at the end of January, 1902, the blockhouse system of the north-eastern district was practically complete. Of the two great cross-country lines, that from Heilbron to the Drakensberg, *via* Frankfort, Tafel Kop, Vrede and Botha's Pass, (hereafter to be called the Northern Line), was finished; that from Kroonstad to the Drakensberg, *via* Lindley, Kaffir Kop, Bethlehem, Eland's River

Blockhouses necessary for both.

Bridge, Harrismith and Van Reenen's Pass, (hereafter to be called the Southern Line), was very nearly complete. Coupled up on the west by the blockhoused railway between Kroonstad and Wolvehoek Junction, and on the east by the fortified posts which guarded the passes of the Drakensberg, these great artificial barriers fenced in a parallelogram, roughly 65 miles by 140, as large, that is to say, as the southern counties of England below a line drawn through Bristol and Chatham. In addition to the railway towns, there were supply depôts at Frankfort, Tafel Kop, Botha's Pass, Lindley, Kaffir Kop, Bethlehem and Eland's River Bridge. These gave strategical mobility such as had never been known before.

Radical change in driving tactics.

But strategical mobility might have been valueless without a radical change in tactics. Those who have followed the evolution of the drive, as traced in previous chapters, will have anticipated the character of this change. They will have observed that hitherto every effort to improve the driving machine had been thrown away. Improvement in the training of the troops, improvement in intelligence, freedom from the paralysing duty of deportation, secrecy of design, utilisation of blockhouse lines, feints on a small scale, feints on a huge scale —all had been unavailing. We need only summarise the two principal causes of failure. The deeper, perhaps, was the centralisation of control in Pretoria, coupled with the absence of a supreme field-commander. Under this system, a column-commander who believed in implicit obedience to orders adhered to a programme too often formal and sterile, while a column-commander who loved independence could gain it only by disobedience to the central authority and disloyalty to his colleagues in the field. In neither case was the sense of responsibility healthily developed, and in both it was liable to collapse at critical moments. The other cause of failure was the lack of tactical coherence. The columns, particularly at night, could not cover the ground, so that the Boers slipped through the meshes of the net. Kitchener's remedies, as embodied in the new model drive, were characteristic. Central control was to be tightened and consolidated. Tactical coherence was to be gained by the construction, if the paradox

may be permitted, of a net without meshes. As far as was humanly possible, every motive and opportunity for disobedience was to be eliminated, and every yard of a given area was to be covered. As though on a huge parade-ground, a thin but continuous line of horsemen, fifty or sixty miles in length, was to ride straight to its front by day, and at night, with every officer and man on outpost duty, was to form a continuously intrenched line of pickets. The flanks of this driving line rested on blockhouse lines strengthened especially for the occasion by fresh battalions of infantry; it drove towards a blockhouse line similarly strengthened, and, if a railway, patrolled by armoured trains. Whether by men, guns, intrenchments, wire, forts or trains, the whole diminishing area was to be hedged completely in. For a parallel to the new driving system we have to go back 2,400 years to the *σαγήνη*, or drag-net, used by Darius of Persia to purge the islands of Chios, Lesbos and Tenedos.*

Weaknesses of the new system.

Here, then, was the final embodiment of that mechanical theory which, as we have often pointed out, underran all Kitchener's great schemes of combined action. Faithful to his own principle, he laboured, regardless of precedent, to give it logical and complete expression. But, since war, regular or irregular, can never be an exact science, through all the rhythmical clangour of this new and potent machinery, there can still be heard pleading for notice the oldest and rudest military maxims. The personal factor was still supreme. In the domain of military control, exhaustively as the details of the march might be prescribed, occasions still arose—fewer, it is true, than of old—when firm field control, as distinguished from central control, was absolutely

* "In every one of these islands . . . they took the inhabitants in a net. And they do it in this way:—Taking one another by the hand and forming a line from the north to the south side, they march over the island, hunting out (*ἐκθηρεύοντες*) the inhabitants" (Herodotus, Bk. vi, Ch. 31). In comparing the difficulties of Kitchener with those of the Persian generals, the reader will not fail to note that the sea was a much more effective barrier than lines of blockhouses. In operating on the mainland Darius never attempted to use the *σαγήνη*; "for," as Herodotus observes with terse significance, "it was not possible."

necessary. In the domain of tactics, the issue, in the last resort, still hung on the fighting qualities shown at the actual point of contact by a small number of Boers and a small number of Britons. For it is obvious that by the means proposed tactical coherence was only to be gained at the expense of tactical solidity. So attenuated a line admitted of little or no reserve, while its advance was only a quasi-offensive advance; an invitation to attack, not an attack. The tactical initiative, as too often in the past, was left to the enemy. If he acted with sufficient resolution and concentrated in sufficient force, he had a good chance of bursting through the barrier, physical or human, at any point.

Its advantages.

What, then, were the advantages of the new system? The principal advantage was moral. Under the new conditions the Boer discipline and organisation were subjected to the most searching and stringent ordeal. Whereas in old days even the weaker spirits had been able to save themselves without much effort and without much fighting, it was now found that all must make real efforts and sacrifices, and all, unless they happened on careless watchers or accidental gaps, must fight or be taken. Kitchener's nets were spread swiftly and suddenly; in a twinkling, the "kraal," as the Boers called it—the circle of steel, fire and wire—was complete; to hesitate was ruin. In so far as they rose to this test, so far did de Wet's men parry the drives. But woe betide the burgher who had fallen into the habit of neglecting orders and of working out his own salvation when a drive approached. Instinctively following the same habit, he now galloped feverishly to and fro, recoiling from a trench here, a blockhouse there, until his horse dropped exhausted in its tracks. There were, moreover, certain new hardships and difficulties which affected all burghers, good and bad alike. Dismounted men found themselves in sore straits, and even the best-mounted and most resolute band had to ride further and harder than in old times. It was only in human nature to endeavour by march and countermarch to find an unguarded gap in the hostile chain; and to this strain both horses and men were liable to succumb. Another difficulty was presented by the women and children

who still clung to the veld. When a few hundred mobile riflemen could tear a rent in the British line with tolerable ease, it was another matter to hold the breach long enough to permit the transit of carts and wagons forging ahead in darkness, panic and confusion.

General criticism.

A British critic cannot fail to regard the new driving system with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he must regret that it was found necessary to adopt it. In view of future military contingencies it would be infinitely more satisfactory, if by excellence and enterprise on normal lines, the Boers could have been forced to fight at a disadvantage in the open field; nor have we concealed our view that many opportunities of forcing a decisive issue had been missed. But there is nothing to be ashamed of in this failure. Pitted against the finest mounted riflemen in the world, fighting for independence on their own soil, the British forces, superior in number and vastly superior in resources, but heterogeneous and improvised, laboured under heavy disadvantages. Indeed, the more carefully we weigh these disadvantages, the greater admiration we shall pay to the military qualities evinced in the new model drive. The distances covered, the speed sustained, the symmetry realised in preserving the dressing of a line fifty or sixty miles long, night and day, over country which was often broken by intricate hills and seamed by rushing torrents—all this constituted a feat of discipline, endurance and skill which, as far as we know, is unparalleled in the history of war. Equally admirable was the prescience and administrative ability required to map out from a central office not only the broad outlines, but the multifarious details of such an operation—itineraries, halting and watering places, supply-points and auxiliary buffers in the shape either of stop-columns for the driving line or of reinforcements for the blockhouse line. If the end in view was glorified drill, it was drill that could never have been carried out without a thoroughly sound and efficient army, a capable staff and a Commander-in-Chief of genius. Nor must it be overlooked that if the tactical formation employed was only quasi-offensive, it was based fundamentally on a contempt of the Boer

offensive powers and implied a consciousness of superiority without which the war could never have been ended.

Origin of the new system.

Who was the author of the new driving system? In a sense, it may be said to have been naturally evolved. The blockhouse lines, as they approached completion, stimulated thought in many active minds, and the analogy between the continuous physical barrier and a continuous human barrier was not difficult to detect. Kitchener, as bearing the supreme responsibility, deserves full credit for sanctioning the final choice. But a word of special praise is due to Colonel Rimington. It will be remembered that towards the close of November, in preparing for the drive from the Liebenberg's Vlei to the railway, he had urged on headquarters the necessity of preserving a continuous outpost-line at night, and had endeavoured to enforce this plan, which was the essence of the new system, among his own troops. The recommendation was pressed on other occasions, and on January 22 was definitely adopted by Kitchener. There was an amusing irony in the fact that Rimington was a source of inspiration, for he himself had been one of the worst offenders in the matter of disobedience to headquarters during combined movements. Only a week before the 22nd of January, he and his column had been lost in the veld, while telegrams flew to and fro, orders and counter-orders harassed other columns, and confusion reigned. But in Rimington extremes met. Fond of a letter of marque, he was equally fond of a big disciplined drill, and he had the penetration to see that with a director of iron will it was drill that was wanted now.

Troops to be employed.

See Ch. XV.

The troops to be employed in the drives were those used in the last campaign against de Wet, with the following additions. Rawlinson was brought down from the Eastern Transvaal; Garratt,* from the northern blockhouse line, whose construction he had been covering; Colonel Dawkins, with the 12th and 20th M.I., from the Northern Transvaal. And it was now for the first time that the Royal Artillery

* Garratt's Column:—5th Queensland Imp. Bushmen, 7th New Zealand M.I., 1 sq. 8th Hussars, 1 sq. 14th Hussars, 200 R. Munsters. Total 1,500.

Mounted Rifles took the field in three corps, each 750 strong, under Colonels James Dunlop, Sir John Jervis and J. L. Keir.*

II

The First Drive

January was a month of transition. The first three weeks were spent in inconclusive operations of the old stamp, complicated at one time by the disappearance of Rimington. A good deal of attention was spent on the hurried completion of the blockhouses. Though tolerably accurate news was obtained of Mears's commando with the guns captured at Tweefontein, intelligence as to de Wet was sparse and dubious. Jan. 1902. See p. 446.

During the last week of January, the new system having been definitely accepted, Kitchener, Ian Hamilton and the staff carried through the preliminary work involved with admirable rapidity. Elaborate tactical instructions were drafted and the various commands reorganised. Four large columns were formed under Rimington, Elliot, Byng and Rawlinson, each leader retaining his old troops, and all, save Elliot, receiving considerable reinforcements. Rimington, strengthened by two new regiments, Jervis's R.A.M.R. and Major Ross's Canadian Scouts, had about 3,000 men in all; the others about 2,000 apiece. Rawlinson absorbed Dawkins and both regiments of I.L.H., under Colonels Briggs and McKenzie. Byng received Garratt's column and Dunlop's Commands re-organised.

* Dunlop's Column (R.F.A.):—8th Brigade Division—Major Young-Bateman, comprising 37th, 61st, 65th Batteries. 12th Brigade Division—Major Guinness, comprising 43rd, 86th, 87th Batteries. Two Colt guns. One pom-pom.

Sir John Jervis's Column (R.F.A.):—5th Brigade Division—Colonel Baldock, comprising 63rd, 64th, 74th Batteries. 9th Brigade Division—Major A. D'A. King, comprising 19th, 20th, 28th Batteries. One pom-pom.

Keir's Column (R.H.A.):—1st Group—Major Ducrôt, "J" and "P" Batteries. 2nd Group—Major F. Lecky, "T" and "O" Batteries. 3rd Group—Major Mercer, "G" and "R" Batteries. Two guns 5th Battery. One pom-pom.

Note.—One section of "J" Battery R.H.A. retained its guns till April, remaining with Rimington's column.

Strategical preparations, Jan. 27.–Feb. 1.

R.A.M.R.; Elliot's force was divided as before into two strong columns under De Lisle and Fanshawe. Meanwhile, the direction to be taken by the first drive was still a matter of uncertainty. A westerly drive from the Liebenberg's Vlei, ordered on the 27th, was almost immediately countermanded in favour of a general movement, not in driving formation, to the south-east. Massed on the Bethlehem-Harrismith blockhouse line, the columns were to wait until exact intelligence of de Wet's movements was received, and the drive arranged accordingly. On February 1, Rimington, Elliot and Rawlinson were all on the blockhouse line, Byng alone being left within the threatened area. Planted near Reitz, he was instructed to keep a sharp watch on Boer movements, to prevent the junction of any two hostile commandos, and, above all, to look out for Mears and the guns.

De Wet, Jan. 1902.

Where, meanwhile, was de Wet? After dispersing his force in the first days of 1902, as described at the end of Chapter XV., he stayed for a week near Reitz. On January 10 he met the President at the farm Leeuwkuil, bade him farewell on the next day and visited in turn the Bethlehem, Kroonstad and Heilbron commandos. Contemptuously indifferent to the growth of the blockhouse system and to the apparently blind gropings of the British columns, he began, nevertheless, towards the close of January, to suspect that something serious was afoot. At this time he was established on the commanding heights of Elandskop, a hill about midway between Heilbron and Reitz, whence he had heliographic communication over a wide area. On February 1, judging that a diversion outside the blockhoused area would meet all contingencies, he sent orders to Mears, who had been sent to the eastward of the Wilge, to rejoin him with the guns; his intention being to break away southward with the Kroonstad and Bethlehem commandos, gather up the Winburg commando and attack whatever he could find in the Winburg district. But events moved too quickly for him.

Action of Roodekraal, Feb. 3.

Between Mears and de Wet lay Byng, with 2,500 men, posted on the banks of the Liebenberg's Vlei, at Fanny's

Major-General E. Locke Elliot, C.B., D.S.O.

Colonel Sir H. S. Rawlinson, Bart., C.B.
Photo by Lafayette.

Colonel The Hon. J. H. G. Byng, M.V.O.
Photo by Fripp, Cape Town.

Colonel M. F. Rimington, C.B.
Photo by Lafayette.

Home Drift. Mears, with 200 men, tried to circle round Byng by the Armstrong Drift, where Elliot and Prinsloo had fought on December 28. Hearing the news on the evening of February 2, Byng at once flung out his force fan-wise in the direction of the river so as to threaten every avenue of advance. At dawn on the 3rd, Mears, having just crossed the Armstrong Drift, ran into Garratt's section of the screen, consisting of 200 New Zealanders and 100 Queenslanders, disposed in small detachments over three miles of country. Garratt, handling his force with dash and skill, charged the Boer rearguard at Roodekraal with 120 New Zealanders under Major Bauchop, and closed on the Boer left and front with the rest of his men. The rearguard, after a slight resistance, fled, and charges on the flank and front, led by Colonel White, completed the rout. Both the guns lost at Tweefontein were recaptured, as well as the dilapidated pom-pom employed at Tigerkloof. Three wagon-loads of ammunition and 15 prisoners, including Captains Muller and Villiers, also fell into British hands, and 13 Boers were killed or wounded. Garratt lost but two men. When Mears discovered the weakness of the British force, he rallied his burghers and tried to retake the guns, but in vain. Other troops coming up he made off to the west and joined de Wet on the following day.

The first drive, Feb. 5–8.

In the meantime, de Wet's presence at Elandskop having been verified by the Intelligence, Kitchener had decided to revert to his original plan and to drive west from the Liebenberg's Vlei to the railway. On February 2, eighteen hours before Byng's success at Roodekraal, orders had reached the driving columns to deploy on the line of the Vlei by the night of the 5th. Punctually on this night 9,000 men were drawn up on a front of fifty-four miles from Frankfort on the north to Kaffir Kop on the south, with Rawlinson on the extreme right, then Byng, then Rimington, and lastly, on the extreme left, Elliot. A simple calculation will show that the space allowed one man for every ten yards. The distance to the railway, about fifty miles, was to be covered in three days and two nights, beginning on the morning of the 6th and ending on the evening of the 8th. Minute and stringent

Map, p. 494.

Formations by day.

instructions had been circulated. By day every column was to cover its front with a screen of scouts, forming a continuous cordon, and, at each flank, touching and skirting the blockhouse lines. The main body, transport and guns of each column were to march a mile behind the centre of their respective screens. A definite extent of front was allotted to each column, and at the end of each day's march of from seventeen to twenty miles a prescribed line was to be taken up and held. The arrangements made for the critical hours of darkness deserve close scrutiny. At night the whole force resolved itself into a continuous line of intrenched pickets, each picket not more than 200 yards from the next, and the flank pickets of each column carefully linked and aligned with those of its neighbours on either hand. With a line of such immense length a measure of discretion had to be left to column-commanders as to the dispositions adopted and the rules enforced. As an example, we may take Rimington's injunctions, and the reader will note their ingenuity and severity.

Formations by night.

Rimington's injunctions.

(1) Every man from the Brigadier to the last native to be on duty and to act as sentry for one-third of the night.

(2) Front Line.—Each squadron to be allotted a length of front, to be covered by intrenched pickets of six men, 50 to 100 yards apart; two men to constitute a double sentry; four to sleep close beside them. Guns loaded with case to be posted in front line; officers and men to form similar posts of six, strengthened by small infantry escorts. Transport, artillery vehicles and all horses to be in small laagers, handy to their units.

(3) Rear Line.—A thin line of rear pickets, each of six men, 500 yards in rear of front line; two pickets to a mile. If attacked, to fall back on the laagers.

(4) Sham Front Line.—A sham line of pickets to be taken up by daylight, a mile or two in front of the real line, and evacuated after dark; fires to be left burning along it. The two real lines to be selected by daylight, but on no account to be occupied till after dark.

(5) Cover and Obstacles.—Advantage to be taken of natural cover and obstacles, such as dongas, spruits and wire fences. Wire entanglements to be used where feasible..

(6) Lights.—After dark no fires or smoking and only whispered talking. Cooking to be done only at mid-day halt, and as much sleep as possible to be taken then too.

(7) Subterfuges.—Tricks of every sort to deceive enemy as to strength and position of real front line. *E.g.*, (a) supports to be loudly called for when a picket is attacked; (b) gaps to be left in the smouldering fires of sham front line, opposite strong points in real front line.

(8) Calculations for a front of ten miles.

	Men.
(1) Front Line.—352 posts of six	2,112
(2) Rear Line.—20 posts of six	120
(3) Laagers, horse-holders, etc.	250
(4) Gun escorts (two guns)	20
	2,502

Subdivisions of columns.

For convenience of handling, each of the four large units of the driving force was subdivided. Rimington, for instance, broke up his command into five small columns.* Rawlinson, after trying a two-fold, eventually made a four-fold division.† It is interesting to note that only four guns were allotted to each big column. A year before, double the number, including howitzers and "cow-guns," would have been considered barely sufficient.

"Stop" columns.

The driving line just described represented only a portion of the troops employed. "Stop" columns were to act on either flank in support of the lateral blockhouse lines. On the north, Colonel Keir, with the Horse Artillery division of the mounted gunners, Colonel A. E. Wilson with Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, Major D. Campbell, of the 9th Lancers,

* Rimington's force:—(1) Headquarter Column, 6th Dragoon Guards, 100 2nd Black Watch; two guns 74th Battery; (2) Colonel Cox—330 3rd New South Wales M.R.; (3) Major Ross—240 Canadian Scouts; (4) Colonel Sir John Jervis—700 R.A.M.R., 75 2nd Black Watch, two guns "J" Battery; (5) Major Bennett—330 3rd New South Wales M.R.

† Rawlinson's force:—(1) Colonel Scott—2nd M.I., 8th M.I.; (2) Colonel Dawkins—12th M.I., 20th M.I.; (3) Colonel Briggs—1st I.L.H.; (4) Colonel Mc Kenzie—2nd I.L.H.; and two guns of the 74th Batt. R.F.A.

Note.—In January, Roberts's Horse, Kitchener's Horse, the Durham Light Infantry and the 21st I.Y. had left Rawlinson's command. The first two units were disbanded.

leading Damant's* column, and General Cunningham with the 28th M.I., were ranged along the Wolvehoek-Frankfort barrier; on the south, only two small columns under Majors Marshall and Holmes,† detached from Colonel J. S. Barker's group in the Winburg district, were to watch the Lindley-Kroonstad barrier. Finally, the blockhouse lines themselves were strengthened for the occasion. The 2nd Seaforth Highlanders swelled the normal garrisons of the Kroonstad-Wolvehoek railway and four armoured trains patrolled the section, while the 2nd Leinsters and three armoured trains did the same for the Wolvehoek-Heilbron branch. The southern blockhouse line, unhappily, was neglected in the matter of reinforcements. To sum up, the cordon, material and human, which surrounded the area of the drive, was made up, in round numbers, of 300 blockhouses, seven armoured trains, and 17,000 men, exclusive of town garrisons. It will be noticed that the weakest quarter was the south.

Reinforcements to blockhouses.

De Wet's decision.

Within the cordon there were, all told, about 1,800 fighting burghers, a small nut to be cracked by such a ponderous steam-hammer. De Wet, warned by the heliograph at Elandskop on the evening of the 5th that every yard between Frankfort and Lindley was lined with troops, at once sent hurried messages to the scattered laagers of the Heilbron, Kroonstad and Bethlehem commandos to concentrate at Slangfontein, a farm fifteen miles south-west of Heilbron and, roughly, in the centre of the "kraal." In addition to the local bands there was established in the Heilbron district a commando of Vredefort and Parys men, under Van der Merwe, who had been driven across the railway some months before. These too received the summons. De Wet's idea was to make a dash to the south, not with any notion that the cordon was weak in that quarter, but simply in accordance with the plan formed some days before. Early on the 6th he started for Slangfontein himself.

* Colonel Damant was still suffering from the wound received at Tafel Kop on Dec. 20, 1901. Column as follows:—Damant's Horse, 200; I.Y., 250; Royal Sussex Regt., 100; two guns 39th Battery, one pom-pom.

† Marshall:—10th M.I., 2 Cos. I.Y., 25 Edinburgh Cyclists, 1 pom-pom: total 700. Holmes:—15th M.I., two guns "O" Batt.; added shortly, 1 Co. I.Y., two pom-poms, O.R.C. Volunteers.

Early on the same day the great driving line was set in motion in his wake. It was fortunate, perhaps, that the country to be traversed was the easiest portion of the north-eastern Free State; for in this first experiment the task of maintaining an even and continuous line, without gaps, kinks or overlappings was found to be far from easy. During the first day, however, few Boers were seen, and in the evening an intrenched line was occupied from Doornkloof on the south to Holland on the north. The drive begins, Feb. 6.

With the line surging forward at his heels, de Wet had reached Slangfontein by midday, to find that his orders had only partially been obeyed. Celliers, commandant of the Kroonstad commando, was at the rendezvous, with Bester of Bethlehem and Mentz of Heilbron; but Van Coller of Heilbron, Field-Cornets Taljaart and Prinsloo of the same district and Van der Merwe of Vredefort had preferred to take their own lines of escape, while several hundred burghers had either never heard the summons or had neglected to join any band. Counting the shaken but faithful contingent of Mears, de Wet mustered in all 700 men, a number sufficient for his immediate purpose. De Wet concentrates.

As no time was to be lost, the force marched south that same afternoon, a portion being detached to guard an immense herd of cattle which the burghers insisted on taking with them. An hour after midnight, in intense darkness, de Wet and the main body stumbled upon the wire fence between two blockhouses, at a point about midway between Kroonstad and Lindley and a little to the west of Doornkloof. On this, as on other occasions to come, there was too little vigilance on the part of the British garrisons. The wires were quietly cut; the whole force crossed without a shot being fired and gained the banks of the Valsch. Soon afterwards the cattle and their escort appeared. Under the guidance of four brothers named Potgieter they had rushed the line by main force with very slight loss. De Wet marched on forty miles to the Doornberg, and there halted to await news. It will be observed that the two small stop-columns, posted on the southern flank, had not been of any use. Marshall, Marches south, Feb. 7, and breaks through.

who was a few miles from the crossing-place, received no warning from the blockhouse line. Holmes, by some staff error, had been diverted towards Bethlehem and rejoined the flank of the driving line only on the next night.* The far stronger northern flank was also found wanting; for Van Coller and Van der Merwe, after bursting through the I.L.H. of Rawlinson's line at Jagersrust, rode on and crossed the Heilbron-Frankfort blockhouse line, with a loss in both adventures of some 30 men.

Night of Feb. 6–7.

Night of Feb. 7–8.

The best of the Boers had escaped, but the drive rolled on, uneventful in the day, lively enough at night, when groups of the enemy or single men flung themselves upon the hedge of steel and fire, to recoil exhausted and desperate. Before sundown on the 7th, the right and centre lined up on the Heilbron-Kroonstad main road. Elliot, his left prolonged by Marshall, touched America siding on the main railway. For the last night and day, therefore, the scene of the drive was a triangle of which Wolvehoek was the apex. As a good example of the difficulty of preserving continuity, it is interesting to note that during the evening Rawlinson discovered, and promptly filled, a gap of two miles between his left and Byng's right, the error having been due to a confusion between two neighbouring farms, both named Paardekraal. With darkness came a scene of extraordinary novelty and excitement. Several hundred Boers were known to be within the cordon, so that every man on the British side was at the highest pitch of expectation. Precautions were redoubled; every obstacle that ingenuity could invent was improvised; the last reserves of ammunition were distributed and their lavish use enjoined; scarcely a soul slept. All night long, without intermission, the rifles crackled up and down the line; all night long the searchlights of the armoured trains could be seen to the north and west flashing broad white beams over the dark veld; and all night long, outnumbered by forty or fifty to one, the peasants of this indomitable

* In the course of his return march, Holmes, without giving notice of his approach, crossed the blockhouse line with 540 men from south to north. It is a proof of the imperfect watch kept that he crossed without challenge, and that on the following day the blockhouse line reported that four Boers and a wagon had penetrated the line!

district scoured the deadly cordon, searching for a hole or cranny of escape, their dark figures silhouetted against the glare of the searchlights. Some few cut their way to safety; some were shot like game; the greater part fell back, stunned and bewildered, into the interior of the trap, their horses foundered, their bandoliers empty, their bodies worn out, to await capture when the pitiless sun and the sharp eyes of the scouts should lay bare their miserable hiding-places.

End of the drive, Feb. 8

On the evening of the 8th, when the line reached the railway, the total results of the drive were found to be 286 Boers killed, wounded or prisoners, half of whom had fallen to Rawlinson. If the reward was small for such a mighty effort the men taken were real fighting men, and the moral effect was considerable; for de Wet's burghers realised what a formidable engine of war their enemies had devised and what a remorseless purpose drove the giant mechanism.

III

The Second Drive

Scope of the second drive, Feb. 18–27. (Map, p. 494.)

Kitchener immediately made preparations for another movement on a vastly greater scale. One comparatively small slice of the North-eastern Free State had been swept clean; the new plan was to drive over all the rest, with a strip of the Transvaal added; to include, that is, the whole country between the Natal Railway, the Drakensberg and the line Winburg-Harrismith. If we eliminate the slice already swept, the country now to be dealt with takes the shape of a huge horse-shoe, lying east and west, with narrow arms swelling to a thick crown. The boundaries of the area just driven became the inner tracing of this horse-shoe, while the outer arc, 340 miles in extent, was the Natal Railway on the north, the Drakensberg on the east, and the line Harrismith-Winburg, blockhoused as far as Bethlehem, on the south. We have called the crown thick, because its width, between the Liebenberg's Vlei and the Drakensberg, is considerably greater than that of either of the two arms;

but, as we shall see directly, this disproportion was remedied in the final phase of the operations by making the Wilge River the inner tracing of the crown.

Two phases.

The movement was to cover fourteen days, and operations were to begin, but not simultaneously, in both arms of the horse-shoe. On the south, Elliot's force, together with the southern "stop" columns of the last drive, under Holmes and Marshall, and two more of Barker's columns, under Colonels Lawley* and Du Cane, were to line up from Kroonstad to the Doornberg and drive eastward to the Lindley-Bethlehem blockhouse line. This first phase was to occupy four days, from the 13th to the 16th. The second phase, beginning on the northern arm, was much more lengthy and elaborate. Rawlinson, Byng and Rimington, gathering in the angle formed by the main railway and the Natal Railway, were to sweep eastward along both banks of the Vaal; Rawlinson, on the left, skirting the Natal Railway; Byng in the centre; and Rimington, on the right, skirting the northern blockhouse line, which was to be watched, as before, by Keir, Wilson and Damant. Since the Vaal was dotted with fortified posts commanding every known drift, it will be observed that this driving line swept along a triple belt of blockhouses. Continuing thus until it reached the meridian of Tafel Kop, it was then to wheel to the right, pivoting on Rimington, until it faced south. The new alignment reached, the columns were to march south, Rimington touching the Wilge, Rawlinson the Drakensberg. Meanwhile Elliot, having swept across from Lindley to the Wilge, was to watch the drifts over that river and gradually work to the south, keeping pace with the general line. The drive was to end on the southern blockhouse line between Eland's River Bridge and Van Reenen's Pass, a line strengthened temporarily by all Barker's columns, six in number, and by every man Rundle could spare from his district. Such, in outline, was the plan, and we may remark at the outset that it was somewhat too ambitious. The troops had but three clear days' rest before marching to their positions, and the strain on the northern columns, who in their great semi-

* Lawley's Column—2nd Dragoon Guards, 7th Hussars.

circular march were to have eleven successive nights of outpost duty, was bound to be terribly severe.

On February 13, Elliot, Marshall, Holmes, Lawley and Du Cane, in the order named, were in line from Kroonstad to the Doornberg, their right flank "stopped" by Barker's two remaining columns, under Colonel Heath and Major Kenna.* It was in the Doornberg, we may remind the reader, that de Wet had taken refuge a week before; but he was now far away and in safety. Learning on the 8th, by heliograph, that the first drive was over and the coast clear, he had marched to the north again, crossing the blockhouse line with slight loss at Palmietfontein and returning to Elandskop, in the middle of the district just swept clean. Here he dismissed his burghers. The first phase of the second drive, therefore, had little interest. When on the 16th the six columns reached the line Lindley-Bethlehem, they had drawn almost blank; for most of the local burghers, in any case not numerous, had slipped through the driving line or the "stops" of the right flank. Reaching Lindley on the 16th and hearing through the Intelligence that de Wet had gone to Elandskop, Elliot promptly despatched De Lisle and Fanshawe to pounce on him. Unfortunately the wrong farm had been named, so that the raid produced only ten unimportant prisoners. Elliot now rested his force at Lindley for three days and on the 21st continued his march to the east, sweeping over the Liebenberg's Vlei and halting on the west bank of the Wilge, in readiness to play his part in the final phase of the operations.

The first phase, Feb. 13–16.

Unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, the columns in the northern arm of the horse-shoe had begun their arduous march. As early as the 14th they had been ready to start, for on that day Rimington, Byng and Rawlinson, reckoned from south to north, were in line on a front of fifty miles, from Gottenberg to Heidelberg. Two days' delay were ordered, however, in order to permit a preliminary clearance of the Zuikerboschrand, a range of bush-covered hills lying in the deep angle between the two railways. Here 400 Boers of the Heidelberg commando, who only three days earlier had swooped upon and severely mauled the 28th

The second phase, Feb. 16–27.

* Heath:—1st M.I., 17th Bn. I.Y., one gun 7th Batt., one pom-pom.

M.I., were known to be established. Rawlinson was sent, in sporting parlance, to "turn out" this corner, with the result that part of the band broke across the Natal Railway at Botha's Kraal,* and the rest, passing into the scope of the drive, headed towards Villiersdorp.

Driving line starts, Feb. 16,

Rawlinson resumed his place in the line; Keir, Damant and Wilson took post on the right flank, and on the 16th the drive began. With regard to the night formations, it should be mentioned that six-men pickets with two sentries having been found to entail excessive work, eight-men pickets with one sentry were substituted. Another noticeable point was that the main columns, reduced to three by the absence of Elliot, were found to be insufficient, so that Damant and Keir soon had to be drawn into line on the right. In three days sixty-five miles were covered, and on the evening of the 18th the left touched Standerton, and the right Tafel Kop, the *point d'appui* for the right wheel.

and wheels at Tafel Kop, Feb. 19.

After a halt of twenty-four hours, while the columns reprovisioned from the depôts at either end of the line, the wheel was begun and, under immense difficulties, extraordinarily well executed. As Rawlinson swept round the angle formed by the Transvaal and Natal frontiers he was joined by the 3rd and 20th Hussars under Colonel Nixon, which issued from Paardekop Station and, after helping Rawlinson to sweep the Verzamelberg, came into the general line between Rawlinson and Byng.

Difficulties now to be faced.

So far all had gone smoothly, but the real difficulties of the drive had now to be faced. The reader will observe that the northern blockhouse line from Tafel Kop to Botha's Pass ran south-east, while the direction of the drive, the wheel once complete, must be due south. Hence the columns of the driving line impinged on the blockhouse line successively and not simultaneously; Rimington striking it first, then Byng, lastly Nixon and Rawlinson. On the 22nd, when the wheel finished, Rimington, resting on the Bamboes Spruit, and Byng, six miles south of Vrede, were both well to the south of it, while Nixon and Rawlinson were still to the north of it. As a halfway breakwater, therefore, the line

* See chap. xvi., p. 462.

had no fair chance, and the flying Boers, with mobs of cattle and half-wild horses, had pierced it like gossamer. Nearly all the Vrede men, under Wessel Wessels, Manie Botha and Ross, together with many of the Frankfort men, had burst through the line on the night of the 21st. This would have been immaterial (for they were still within the area of the drive) had not other weaknesses been present. In its new alignment, from the junction of the Wilge and the Bamboes Spruit to the Drakensberg at Kleinfontein, the driving line had extended to the enormous length of sixty miles. Even with Keir and Damant drawn into line on the right and with Nixon stiffening the centre, the cordon was dangerously slender. It is true that, as the march progressed, the front would narrow to the thirty-five miles between Eland's River Bridge and Van Reenen's Pass; but the contraction would be slow at first, and a crisis might arise before it was appreciable. The weakness was all the greater in that the country to be driven was peculiarly rugged. It is here that the great Drakensberg range melts into the vast plateau of the Free State. A succession of streams—the Bamboes Spruit, the Hol Spruit, the Cornelis and Molen Rivers, all running in precipitous, tortuous beds, flow west from the mountains and discharge into the Wilge, carving up the country into great hog's-back ridges, themselves diversified by many an intricate glen and ravine. All these rivers lay athwart the track of the drive, and to those who had to arrange for a continuous intrenched line at night afforded a succession of problems of the greatest nicety. Although some streams formed natural lines of defence of the strongest character, to have followed their devious windings would have required three times the number of men.

The barriers.

The Wilge itself was another weak point. Saving a short section from Majoor's Drift to the southern blockhouse line, which was held by the 14th Hussars from the Harrismith district, Elliot alone had been deputed to guard this flank. To hold the drifts, which were numerous, over a tortuous front of forty miles as the crow flies, with 2,000 men, was impracticable. Elliot did his best, taking up a night line from Strydpoort on the north to Kalkoenkrans on

the south; but this left gaps at both ends, and was a flimsy screen at the best. On the other hand, the southern boundary was almost needlessly strong. Rundle having given up the command of the Harrismith district on February 19, his successor, General E. S. Brook, was responsible for the defences in this quarter. Every available man, mounted or dismounted, was thrown into the blockhouse line. Bethlehem and Harrismith were nearly denuded, and, in addition to the district troops, Barker's entire group of six columns was pressed into the service and ranged at the south-western corner of the "kraal." The eastern boundary, the Drakensberg, needs little comment. The passes were all strongly held, and Natal was warned to watch the farther side; beyond that no special precautions were necessary.

The Boers enter the trap, Feb. 17–22.

Let us turn now to the Boers. We left de Wet near Elandskop on the 17th, smiling over the failure of Elliot's night raid. Conscious that a crisis was approaching, but unaware what shape it would take, he decided that his place was beside his Government. On the 18th, therefore, he rode eastward and met Steyn at Slabbert's farm, Rondebosch, eight miles north-east of Reitz. The President, having been well outside the limits of the first drive, had had three weeks of rest, which were now to be brought to a rough end. On the 21st, news coming in of Elliot's approach from the west, the whole party rode to the south-east, crossed the Wilge south of its junction with the Cornelis, and laagered at the farm of a certain Christiaan de Wet, not related to the General. They thus unwittingly entered the most formidable trap that the British had ever devised; and the jaws closed behind them when Elliot occupied the drifts. The character and imminence of the crisis were now suddenly disclosed. Messages came in from all sides showing that the region between Vrede and Harrismith, the Wilge and Drakensberg, was sealed by troops and blockhouses and thronged with bewildered commandos and fugitive non-combatants. In so far as it was meant to confuse and deceive the Boers, Kitchener's elaborate scheme had worked to perfection. As we have seen, the Vrede and many of the Frankfort burghers, yielding before the drive, had pierced

the northern blockhouse line, and, thinking this meant freedom, found that it meant envelopment. Three bands under Mentz of Heilbron, Beukes of Bethlehem and Van der Merwe of Vredefort, knowing nothing of the driving line, had given way before Elliot's march to the Wilge and were also within the trap. So, naturally, were all the Harrismith men whose farms lay north of the southern blockhouse line. Jan Meyer was their commandant. Nor was this all; for Rawlinson's march north of the Vaal had swept in some 300 Transvaalers under General Alberts. All together, about 3,000 fighting men stood within a "corral" held by 30,000, and it depended on their own discipline and resource whether they should take advantage of the profound tactical weakness of the combination opposed to them. But there was one distracting factor, a multitude of non-combatants, old men, women and children, all anxious to be saved and presenting a non-military problem of the most embarrassing sort.

De Wet decides to break through the driving line, Feb. 23.

On the evening of the 22nd the Government laager was only twenty miles south of the driving line. Manie Botha, leading 200 Vrede burghers, had just ridden into the laager with the latest news; he was followed by Ross with another 200, and by Alberts, leading the Transvaalers and a small party of Frankfort men. Jan Meyer with the Harrismith men was known to be hurrying up from the south, but there was no time to wait for him. De Wet resolved at once to break through the driving line. Sending an urgent message to Meyer to join him with all haste, he broke camp at 10 P.M. and marched north-east. At 3 A.M. on the 23rd he was at Jan Cronje's farm, near the Cornelis River, and at midday, after another short march, he had crossed the Cornelis and reached Howell's farm at Brakfontein. Since the crossing of the Wilge, refugees of all ages and both sexes, bringing their wagons and cattle, had been attaching themselves to the force, so that an unmanageable mass of vehicles and beasts encumbered the progress of the little army. At Brakfontein Jan Meyer, with half the Harrismith commando, caught up de Wet; the other half was still too far away to be of any use. De Wet's scouts,

meanwhile, had ridden far ahead and were probing for a practicable gap in the British driving line, which on this day, the 23rd, had advanced eight miles to the line of the Hol Spruit. On comparing the reports of his scouts in the evening de Wet decided to make the farm Kalkkrans, where the Hol Spruit makes an abrupt loop to the south, and where, he was told, there was a gap in the British intrenched line.

Rimington and Byng at Langverwacht, Feb. 23.

Though de Wet's scouts might well have imagined a gap, in point of fact there was none. In taking up their line for the night, Rimington and Byng had aimed at following the course of the Hol Spruit, which was a strong natural line of defence. But, as we have pointed out, there were not enough men to hold the full length of these winding streams. It was just by the southward loop in the river that Rimington's left-hand column, under Colonel Cox, joined hands with Byng's right-hand column, under Colonel Garratt. Most of Garratt's intrenched line was on the south side of the stream, eastward of the loop; all Rimington's line was on the north side, opposite and to the westward of the loop. Had Rimington had more men, he would have lined the loop itself; as it was, he took the next best line in rear. This was the crest of Langverwacht hill which throws out a long, sharp spur towards the loop, but, more to the west, recedes further and further from the stream. Garratt's right crossed the water, mounted the steep slope for 1,200 yards and met Rimington's left on the summit of the spur. From this point Rimington's line, following the crest, bent back for more than a mile at right angles to Garratt's, and only resumed its westerly course at a point some two miles from the Spruit. Thus it came about that de Wet's scouts, riding along the south bank of the Spruit, over the farm Kalkkrans, and seeing the British line suddenly disappear for a distance of several miles, reported a gap. It remains to explain that Garratt's right, on the steep slope of Langverwacht, was composed of the 7th New Zealand M.I. under Colonel Porter, disposed in intrenched posts of seven men each; Rimington's left, of the 3rd New South Wales M.R., under Colonel Cox, in intrenched posts of eight men each. On the summit of the spur, where

Map, p. 490.

the two lines joined, stood one of Rimington's pom-poms, under Captain Begbie.

Soon after sunset, under a full moon shining fitfully through banks of cloud, the throng of Boer horsemen, vehicles and cattle set forth from Brakfontein. For some time there was chaos—a medley of bellowing cattle and yelling Kaffirs, of wagons, buggies and spiders, of frightened women and crying children—through which the fighting men had to force their way as best they could. Gradually, under de Wet's vigorous hand, order grew out of this pandemonium. The commandos, 800–900 men in all, were pushed to the front, with a vanguard ahead and a wing on either flank. In the centre rode de Wet, Steyn and their staffs; then came the vehicles; then the cattle, covering (so an eye-witness * estimated) six miles of the veld. On approaching the Hol Spruit, a little before 11 P.M., de Wet detailed a picked force, under Ross, Manie Botha and Alberts, to ride forward and hammer a breach in the British line. The main body was to follow in support, and the horde was to pour through the breach as soon as it was safe. The spruit was crossed at Kalkkrans, but not without confusion and panic, for the civilian crowd pressed blindly forward, obstructing and demoralising the main body. The advanced party, however, struck boldly and surely. Skirting the slopes of Langverwacht, where it overhangs the loop, they fell on Porter's New Zealanders, overwhelmed the post nearest the river and thence worked upward, enfilading the line and, gallantly as the defenders fought, destroying the posts in detail. Thus they reached the top of the hill, and here they were checked. Porter's line from the river to the summit had been cut to pieces; Begbie's pom-pom had jammed, and Begbie was dead; but Cox, on Rimington's left, grasping the situation, swung round his nearest pickets and faced the Boers steadily. The issue of the fight now hung in the balance. The British formation permitted of no reserves, save such as could be gathered piecemeal by calling in men from a long, extended line. On the other hand, the

Action of Langverwacht, night of Feb. 23.

* There is an admirable description of the scene in "Through Shot and Flame," by the Rev. J. D. Kestell, Chaplain to Steyn and de Wet.

Boer main body, confused and demoralised, hesitated to rush through the broad breach of half-a-mile which their resolute van had cut for them. Jan Meyer, with the Harrismith men, lost his bearings, swerved away to the east and attacked the section of Byng's line held by Dunlop's mounted gunners. He was repulsed with loss and fled to the south. Slowly, however, the advance progressed. De Wet stormed and threatened; the burghers came on, in no order, but in a considerable volume; Steyn and the members of the Government riding in the midst. Some of the horde, who were riding, followed, and by midnight 600 of the best fighting men and a small part of the motley host that clung to them were safely through the dreaded cordon. The rest —faint-hearted burghers, occupants of vehicles and the whole multitude of cattle—were left behind, and for the most part fell eventually into British hands. De Wet left 14 dead on the field and carried away 20 wounded. The New Zealanders, who had shown fine tenacity, had 23 killed and 43 wounded. Cox had but 3 men wounded, and the pom-pom gunners the same.

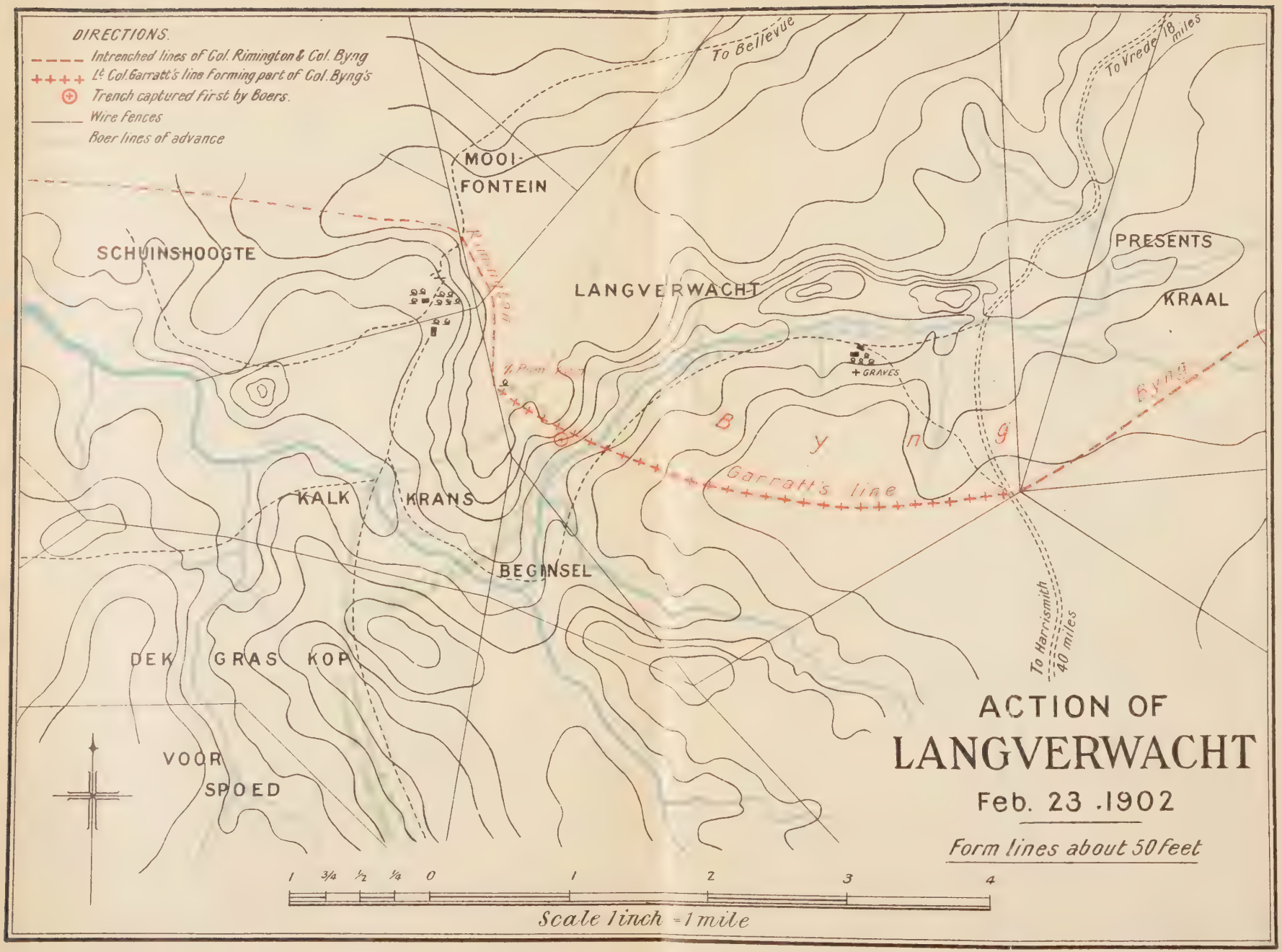
De Wet breaks through.

De Wet's was not the only force to escape on the 23rd. Wessel Wessels, with the rest of the Vrede commando, passed the Wilge River cordon by an unguarded ford at Zandveld, and was followed by Beukes, with the Bethlehem men. On the next day, Mentz, with the Heilbron men, stole across at Waai Water.

Other bands escape, Feb. 23–24.

On the 24th, after the eventful night we have described, the driving line halted, in response to an urgent request from Rawlinson, whose men needed rest after their long circular march of the last five days. At dawn on the 25th the advance was resumed, this time to the Cornelis River, and on the 26th to the Molen River, one day's march from the goal. The 27th was the culminating day of what had hitherto been a most disappointing drive. Since the 16th only two hundred prisoners had been taken, and all but one of the organised commandos had won their freedom. But at the last moment the luck turned. The only commando within the narrow quadrilateral, forty miles by fourteen, which remained to be driven, was that of

Climax of the drive, Feb. 24–27.



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Harrismith under Jan Meyer. Recoiling from the fight at Langverwacht, Meyer had retired to the south, picked up the rest of his commando, and striven for an outlet to the south-west. On the night of the 26th he had made a dash for the Wilge at Springfield Drift, but precious days had passed since Wessels, Beukes and Mentz had crossed that river so easily. Elliot had closed down to the south and now, in combination with Brook's troops from Harrismith, held the diminished cordon strongly. Beaten back from the drift by the 3rd Dragoon Guards, Meyer hurried to the east. Forts, guns, bayonets bristled on every side; he and his men lost heart, and when Rawlinson reached the Tandjesberg, a wild group of hills between the Molen and the Dwaal Spruit, he found the commando, 571 in number, standing ready to surrender. A week before, Park, in the North-eastern Transvaal, had taken 164 prisoners at one blow, and until this surrender in the Tandjesberg that figure was the highest since Prinsloo's capitulation in July, 1900. Thus at the eleventh hour the drive was amply justified. Its total results were 778 prisoners, 50 Boers killed, 25,000 head of cattle and 200 vehicles.

Capture of Harrismith commando.

(See p. 465.)

IV

The Third Drive

Kitchener's appetite for drives suffered no check. After a bare three days to recover from one of the most exhausting operations of the war, the troops moved on to further work. During the halt certain changes in command were made. Byng, who had served with high credit throughout the war, now returned to England, and Garratt succeeded to Byng's group of columns, handing over his own unit to Colonel the Hon. H. White. McKenzie's 2nd I.L.H. left Rawlinson for the Transvaal, and Lawley's column, after joining in the first phase of the next drive, left Barker's group and was sent also to the Transvaal. Lastly, the columns of Keir, Damant and Wilson were united in one group of 2,000 men, controlled by Keir. The final field of the third drive was to be the same as that of the

Changes in command.

Plan of the third drive.

first, namely, the area between the Liebenberg's Vlei and the railway; but before ranging his columns on the Vlei, Kitchener planned to throw them fan-wise over the vast quadrilateral Lindley-Frankfort-Tafel Kop-Harrismith, so as to sweep into the "kraal" all the commandos which had escaped from the recent drive. This was done by two distinct movements. The southern segment of the fan was formed by Garratt, Nixon and Rawlinson, with 5,500 men, who swept west on a front of thirty miles from Majoor's Drift, on the Wilge, to the line Lindley-Noble's Mills; the northern and largest segment by Barker, Elliot, Lawley, Rimington and Keir, with 10,000 men, who drove north on a front of fifty miles from the line Majoor's Drift-Bethlehem to the northern blockhouse line.

Flight of Steyn and De Wet, March 5–17.

By a fatality for the Free State Government these two segments met almost exactly at the spot which they had chosen for their latest refuge. This was the farm Rondebosch, north-east of Reitz, whence they had fled on February 21, and whither they returned on March 2, after their terrible experience at Langverwacht and a subsequent rest in the Bothasberg. Christiaan de Wet had remained with them, and, as always, Van Niekerk's bodyguard. The news soon reached Rondebosch that on March 4 the northern group of British columns had started, and on March 5 the southern. Whither to fly? This time Steyn decided to leave the north-eastern district altogether, in the faint hope that the disappearance of the Government might induce Kitchener to stay his hand in the fierce punishment now being meted out to this unhappy corner of the fatherland. Comparative peace reigned in the north-western district, so the resolve was made to visit Badenhorst in the plains about Bothaville. De Wet, reluctant to leave his harassed burghers, yielded to pressure; and he alone, it is certain, could have guided the travellers to their goal. Rather than risk crossing the front of the pursuing columns, a circuitous route was taken which involved a ride of 180 miles and the crossing of three blockhouse lines. The party started at sunset on the 5th and rode hard to the north. On the afternoon of the following day they met Van der Merwe's commando and, to the delight

of the Vredefort men, who had the prospect of regaining their own district under unerring leadership, de Wet bade them follow. The westerly part of the northern blockhouse line was gaining a poor reputation for vigilance, and on this occasion was crossed without opposition on the night of the 6th at Holland, between Heilbron and Frankfort. At 11 P.M. on the 7th the fugitives reached the trunk railway between Wolvehoek and Viljoen's Drift. Stealthily the wires were cut; there was a splutter of fire from a blockhouse, the rattle of a Maxim, and then once more the freedom of the dark plains. On the 8th Parys was reached; on the 9th Vredefort, and on the 13th, Van der Merwe having been dropped, the party was confronted with the Vaal-Kroonstad blockhouse line at a point where it rested on the Valsch. Practice had made perfect, so that the little band passed unscathed through entanglements and bullets. Since they were now close to the Transvaal border, they decided to visit De la Rey. Steyn and de Wet had long desired an interview with that general, and an additional reason was the state of the President's health. Physically ailing for some time past, he was now suffering from a painful affection of the eyes, for which he wished the treatment of Dr. Rennenkampf, De la Rey's medical director. The decision involved one more adventure, the passage of the Vaal, whose drifts were closely guarded. Unobserved, however, the party forded the river a mile below Commando Drift, rode to the north, and on the 17th met De la Rey at Zendelingsfontein, north-east of Wolmaransstad. For reasons which will soon appear, it was a joyous meeting.

The third drive, March 4–11.

To return to the third drive. Against the mother-wit of the Boers, sharpened by the events of the last month, the great machine worked blindly and badly. Save for 40 or 50 prisoners, who were ferreted out of caves and holes in the valley of the Wilge, and for a big cache of ammunition, which was discovered by Major Ross, the first phase was a waste of time and energy. The marches were so long and the fatigue of the troops so great, that there was much confusion and irregularity, while the absence of a supreme field-commander was never more keenly felt. Moreover,

both Rimington's flanks and one of Rawlinson's were open. Van Coller, with part of the Heilbron commando, slipped away to the north-east; Hattingh and the Kroonstad men broke through the southern blockhouse line, and other bands vanished in various directions. Thus, when the two British divisions joined hands on March 9 and took up their dressing on the Liebenberg's Vlei, there was only one commando in front of them, that of Mentz, with 400 Heilbron burghers. Meanwhile, grave news had reached Kitchener from the Western Transvaal, causing him to detach Keir's group and send it with all haste to the nearest railway station. The rest of the army, 13,500 strong, took up its dressing on the line Lindley-Frankfort, and in two long and rapid marches closed on the main line of railway. Mentz, on the last night, took his courage in both hands and rode at the Wolvehoek-Heilbron branch—rode at it literally, charged the wire fence on a front of sixty yards, trampled it down and passed. Although there was a blockhouse a hundred yards away, on each side of the crossing, not a shot was fired until the whole band was across. Thus ended the third great drive, with a reward, for both phases, of only a hundred Boers.

Other drives were to follow, but the centre of interest now shifts suddenly and dramatically to another region altogether. Before passing thither, we shall remind the reader again that the success of the new driving system cannot be measured by visible results alone. The nervous worry, the sense of relentless persecution from which the Boers suffered, produced a strong moral effect.

DRIVES IN THE
N.E. ORANGE FREE STATE
FIRST DRIVE 5th.-8th. FEB. 1902
SECOND " 13th.-27th. " "
Scale 19½ miles-1 inch.
DIRECTIONS
Blockhouses
S. A. C. Posts
Track of De Wet
Other Boer bands
Scene of De Wet's first meeting with Steyn. Jan. 10.
" " " " concentration Feb. 6.
Line of first drive as intrenched at night
" " second " " " " "
JOHANNESBURG
Germiston
Springs
Elandsfontein Junction
Ventersdorp
Bank
Wolverdiend
Frederikstad
Klip R. Sta.
Heidelberg
Meyerton
Vereeniging
POTCHEFSTROOM
KLERKSDORP
Vlakf.
Greylingstad
Val
Waklaagte
Standerton
Vaal R.
Kromdraai
Platrand
Paardekop
Amersfoort
Villiersdorp
Cornelia
Frankfort
Vrede
Volksrust
Sand River Stn.
Laings Nek
Majuba
Botha's Pass
Newcastle
Cattle Pass
Bothaville
Doornkraal
Elandsvlei
Vierfontein
Reitzburg
Vredefort
Parys
Wolvehoek
Grootvley
Heilbron
Vredefort Road
Serfontein
Rhenoster Kop
KROONSTAD
Boschrand
Geneva Sid.
Holfontein
Ventersburg Road
Ventersburg
Odendaals Rust
Welgelegen
Therons Sid.
Smaldeel
Vet River
Winburg
Brandfort
Lindley
Reitz
Bethlehem
Senekal
Ficksburg
Fouriesburg
Harrismith
Elands River Drift
Witzies Hoek
Mont aux Sources (11,000)
Butha Butha
BASUTOLAND
Bezuidenhout Pass
Oliviers Hoek
De Beers Pass
Van Reenen's Pass
Ladysmith
Colenso
Chieveley
Frere
Tugela R.
DRAKENSBERG
NATAL
Rawlinson 14 Feb.
Rimington 14 Feb.
Nixon
Byng. Rawlinson
Barker
26 Feb
Witte Kopjes
Newmarket
Bothasberg
Tafel Kop
Tafelberg
Retiefs Nek
Commando Nek
Tabaksberg
Welkom

CHAPTER XVIII

YZER SPRUIT AND TWEEBOSCH

(Western Transvaal, February–March, 1902)

Kitchener announces bad news, March 11.

On March 11, the culminating day of the third drive, Kitchener met some of the incoming columns at Kopjes Station and announced that our troops in the Western Transvaal had experienced two defeats and that Lord Methuen was a prisoner in De la Rey's hands.

Situation in the Western Transvaal, Oct.–Feb. Map, Western Transvaal, end of chap. xx.

For a long time past hostilities had languished in the Western Transvaal. Five uneventful months had slipped away since De la Rey's night assault on Kekewich at Moedwil, and four since his attack upon von Donop at Kleinfontein. Kitchener, with Botha and de Wet on his hands, not to speak of Cape Colony, had been only too glad to leave De la Rey alone as long as that stout old veteran let him alone. For the greater part of the five months only three columns, under Methuen, Kekewich and Hickie,* operated in the Western Transvaal, and of these Kekewich and Hickie were periodically withdrawn from active work to assist in guarding blockhouse construction. This latter work, as we saw in Chapter XIV., was pushed on with energy; but even at the end of February 1902, there still remained a vast area, from the Marico and Zwartruggens on the north to the Vaal on the south, within which De la Rey held almost undisputed sway. If we

* Methuen.—5th, 10th, 19th Battalions I.Y.; B.S.A. Police; Bech. Rifles; one bn. North. Fusiliers; half bn. Loyal N. Lancashires; 4th and 38th Batteries; various small Colonial contingents. Total—about 3,000.

Kekewich.—500 1st Scottish Horse; 200 I.Y.; 2nd Norfolk Regiment; two guns 28th Battery.

Hickie.—250 Infantry; 250 M.I.; three guns.

remember the quality of his commandos, the perfection of his organisation and the paucity of the British columns which entered his domains, we shall pronounce it highly creditable to the commanders of these columns that the few noteworthy incidents which broke the monotony of the campaign were, with one small exception, successes.*

Incidents of the period.

Methuen, based on the Taungs-Mafeking Railway, and Kekewich, based on the Klerksdorp Railway, sometimes attempted combinations and sometimes took long independent expeditions. In these, the wild recesses of the Zwartruggens, De la Rey's strongest centre, were wisely let alone and operations confined to the districts of Bloemhof, Wolmaransstad and Lichtenburg. November was a blank month; December not quite blank; for on the 13th and 16th Methuen succeeded in surprising two of Commandant Potgieter's laagers in the Makwassi hills, near Wolmaransstad, taking 36 prisoners and 170 vehicles. On the 22nd, however, some companies of his Yeomanry were overwhelmed by Celliers of Lichtenburg, losing 8 men killed, 25 wounded and 40 prisoners. February, on the other hand, began with a striking success. On the 4th, Kekewich and Hickie pounced on the laager of Commandant Sarel Alberts and

* The district commands in the W. Transvaal were as follows:—

(1) The "District West of Johannesburg"—Major-General Mildmay Willson. Western boundary—Klerksdorp, Schoon Spruit, Ventersdorp. Sub-districts: (a) Potchefstroom—Brig.-General J. C. Barker; (b) Krugersdorp—Colonel H. T. Hicks.

(2) Rustenburg—Colonel H. Wylly.

(3) Methuen's command: (a) W. Transvaal from the western frontier to the line Zeerust-Lichtenburg-Wolmaransstad-Vaal; (b) Cape Colony (bordering Transvaal) from Mafeking to Fourteen Streams.

Organisation of the W. Transvaal commandos under Assistant Commander-in-Chief De la Rey:—

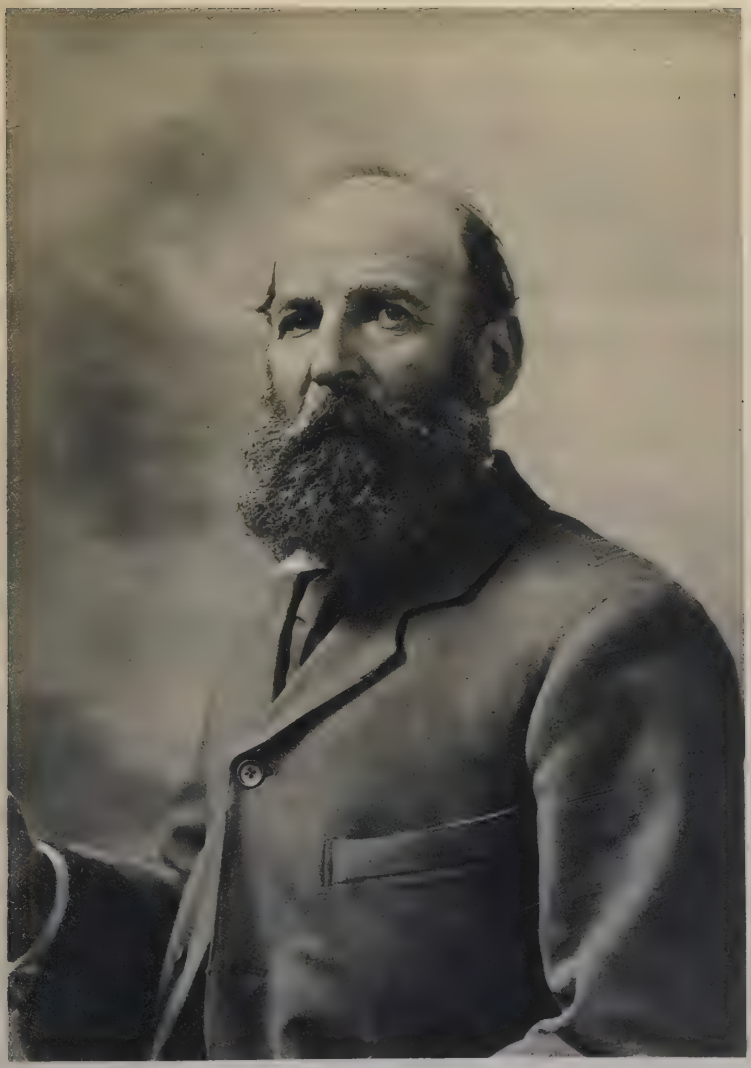
Vecht-General Kemp.—Krugersdorp, West Pretoria, Rustenburg, Staats Artillerie, Zarps.

Vecht-General Celliers.—Zwartruggens—F. C. Van Tonder; Elands River—F. C. Van Heerden. Lichtenburg: Commandants Vermaas and Sarel Alberts. Marico.

Vecht-General Liebenberg.—Potchefstroom: Commandants Wolmarans and Redlinghuis.

Vecht-General Du Toit.—Wolmaransstad: Commandants Potgieter and Van Rensburg.

Commandants Van Zyl and T. de Beers.—Bloemhof.



General J. H. De la Rey.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

took 132 prisoners, including Alberts himself. Major Leader, of the Carabiniers, led the mounted troops in this brilliant little affair, the scene of which was Gruisfontein, fifteen miles east of Lichtenburg. Three days later, in the Wolmaransstad district, Potgieter was again caught napping, and again lost 36 prisoners to Methuen.

Von Donop occupies Wolmaransstad, Feb. 8.

But this success was the last. Called by administrative work to Vryburg, Methuen left the field on February 8, placing Colonel von Donop, who had always commanded his mounted troops, in charge of the whole column. Von Donop's orders were to occupy the town of Wolmaransstad and to use it as a base of operations. This, we may note in passing, was an infraction of the wholesome rule that no towns should be thus used which were not upon a railway or a blockhouse line. An isolated base, dependent for supplies on convoys whose travels were always hazardous and whose escorts demanded constant and heavy abstractions from the fighting force, gave more trouble than it was worth. In this case, Klerksdorp, fifty miles distant, was the source of supplies. The first convoy sent there by von Donop, starting on February 11 and returning on the 18th, met with no accident. The second left on the 23rd, escorted by 230 men of the 5th I.Y., 225 of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 80 of Paget's Horse and about 60 mounted details belonging to various corps, together with two guns of the 4th Battery and a pom-pom. The force numbered about 700 and was in charge of Colonel Anderson, the officer in command of the 5th I.Y. Under his protection was a convoy of 150 wagons, mostly empty, and three carts loaded with small-arms ammunition.

Anderson's convoy despatched, Feb. 23.

De la Rey's ambuscade, Feb. 24.

De la Rey's crying need was not food, of which his men had plenty, but ammunition and mounts. The scarcity of cartridges, in particular, had had much to do with his passive attitude during the last four months. Now, however, it was plain that the hour for action had arrived. Such news as filtered in from other quarters was bad. It had long been known that Botha's commandos were seriously shaken, and by the last week in February the news came that Botha himself had deserted the high veld. Reports from the Free State, where the second great drive was in full swing,

were no less gloomy. Under strong appeals from Botha and de Wet, De la Rey decided to bestir himself, and his first and most urgent necessity was to secure ammunition. The Boer system of intelligence in the Western Transvaal, based on the screen of scouts and the heliograph, was well-nigh perfect for its purpose. Liebenberg of Potchefstroom watched the convoy assemble and start, dogged its path, and reported all to De la Rey, with the result that that leader was able on the night of February 24 to mass 1,200 men on the road from Wolmaransstad to Klerksdorp without an inkling of his design having reached the ears of either of those garrisons, or of Anderson's escorting force, or, it should be added, of Kekewich, who with his own column and that of Colonel Grenfell, the recent successor of Hickie, was marching south from Lichtenburg, and camped on the 24th at Brakpan, 28 miles north-west of Klerksdorp. Rumours, it is true, were afloat, but none that were thought to justify any special precautions or any specially concerted action. By 1 A.M. of the 25th, in intense darkness, De la Rey had posted his force in ambuscade on the north side of the road, between the Jagd and Yzer Spruits. Liebenberg, hidden in a mass of dense scrub which bordered the road, was to surprise the head of the column, Kemp was to attack the centre, Celliers the rear.

Action of Yzer Spruit, Feb. 25.

Towards evening on the 24th, Anderson's convoy, after two days of uneventful marching, crossed the Yzer Spruit and camped on the farm lands of Elandslaagte, thirteen miles from Klerksdorp. The next day's march was to be the last, and so little was danger dreamt of that Paget's Horse, 80 strong, were permitted to ride into Klerksdorp that same evening. At 4.30 on the following morning, while it was still pitch dark, the convoy resumed its march, with a company of infantry on either flank, an advanced guard of Yeomanry supported by the guns and a company of infantry, and a rearguard of similar composition but without artillery. About half-an-hour after starting, at a point where the ground first begins to fall towards the Jagd Spruit, the advanced guard approached a dark expanse of bush. Suddenly, the border of this thicket, scarcely twenty yards distant, was outlined in flame, and Liebenberg's bullets swept through the troops and transport. A few minutes

later Kemp attacked the centre and Celliers the rearguard, which was still near the camping-ground. Disaster, under the circumstances, was scarcely avoidable; yet all these first assaults were steadily repulsed. Under the fire of the artillery, pluckily directed by Lieutenant Patterson, Liebenberg's men recoiled into their scrub; Kemp's attack flickered out; Celliers alone hung like a bulldog on the rearguard. In the meantime, the wagons, which had stampeded to the rear at the first alarm, were rallied by Lieutenant Turner and parked, by Anderson's orders, near the front of the column in partially sheltered ground. Daylight was strengthening, when Kemp charged right up to the convoy, but was again driven off. There was a partial lull, in which Anderson ordered the convoy to advance supported by the rest of the column. It would have been wiser, perhaps, to have concentrated round the wagons and waited; for every movement of the panic-stricken convoy was fraught with peril. In advancing to the Jagd Spruit the drivers got out of control, threw some of the troops into confusion, and finally lashed their teams pell-mell down the slope. A sharp declivity bordered the drift; the first wagon stumbled and stuck; others followed suit, and then the whole mass collapsed into irremediable confusion. The spectacle heartened the Boers. De la Rey ordered a general charge on horseback, with fire from the saddle. The rearguard, under Captain A. L. Phillips, which hitherto had stood unflinchingly under heavy losses, gave way before overwhelming odds; the guns and other troops were ridden down, and although many brave groups of men fought to their last cartridge, the Boer victory was assured.

A complete disaster.

Sunrise shone upon a complete disaster. Save a few men who escaped to Klerksdorp, the whole force, with its artillery and material, was in De la Rey's hands. Five officers and 48 men were killed; 6 officers and 124 men wounded; the rest were prisoners. While Kemp covered operations, De la Rey took all the plunder that he wanted—half a million rounds of ammunition and some hundreds of mules and horses were the principal prizes—burnt many of the wagons, and carried off the rest, with the guns and prisoners, to the north-west.

Vain efforts to retaliate, Feb. 25–Mar. 1.

The action had happened within easy earshot of Klerksdorp, the headquarters of General J. C. Barker, and within thirteen miles of Hartebeestfontein, whither, on this same morning, Kekewich and Grenfell were marching. A decision had been come to recently to establish a permanent Constabulary post at the strong position of Hartebeestfontein, and it so happened that a detachment of 300 S.A.C. under Colonel Edwards, with a quantity of transport, had been sent out from Klerksdorp at 3 A.M. on the 25th to meet Kekewich at that point. This detachment, when already several miles on the road to the north, heard heavy firing from the south. Edwards, who was in rear with the transport, despatched the S.A.C. under a junior officer in the direction of the firing. The officer in question, in perfectly good faith, but under some strange optical delusion, satisfied himself that the convoy was safe and reported accordingly. In Klerksdorp, meanwhile, Major Roy had hastily gathered some 250 mounted details, including 80 National Scouts, and had ridden out to the Jagd Spruit. Kemp, with a strong covering force was ready for the move; Roy could make no impression, and returned at midday with the bare news that the convoy had been captured. In the afternoon, under orders from Barker, Edwards and Roy made a combined advance, but all touch had by this time been lost; so that Kekewich, who reached Hartebeestfontein at 11, was in possession only of vague and contradictory rumours as to the direction taken by the Boers. His men being already tired with a long march, Kekewich decided against pursuit, and moved to Rietkuil, six miles nearer Klerksdorp. De la Rey, therefore, made good his retreat. On the 26th he was at Rietfontein, a farm about equi-distant from Wolmaransstad and Klerksdorp, and from here he sent off the prisoners to the British post at Kraai Pan, between Mafeking and Vryburg.

Kekewich, on the morning of the 26th, received an urgent message from Kitchener, ordering him to march on Wolmaransstad, gather up the rest of von Donop's force, together with Edwards's S.A.C., and organise a strong flying column for the pursuit of De la Rey. Kekewich obeyed, and the flying column of 1,500 men, under Grenfell's command, left Wolmaransstad on March 1. But this, like

so many other efforts to retrieve a reverse, came to nothing. For the time being De la Rey disappeared.

Methuen prepares to march against De la Rey, Feb. 25–Mar. 2.

Methuen, as we saw a few pages back, had returned on February 8 to Vryburg, where he occupied himself with the administrative work of his vast district. On the 25th came the news of the disaster to von Donop's convoy. Two wearisome years of perilous and generally fruitless warfare had not damped Methuen's ardour. In spite of miserably inadequate forces he resolved at once to take the field. Major Paris, who had long been in command of the small force known as the "Kimberley column," was authorised to strengthen it with various detachments and to organise the whole as a new force. The result was one of the most extraordinary columns which ever took the field in South Africa. The "Kimberley column," before it had been added to, was unusually heterogeneous, even in days where heterogeneous columns were the rule. In its total of 700 men it contained eight different fighting units. When strengthened to 1,300 by the drafts now added, the number of units was raised to fourteen, of very unequal quality. There were 200 of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, under Captain Montagu; 100 of the 1st Loyal North Lancashires, under Lieutenant Paul, two guns of the 4th Battery, under Lieutenant Venning, a young officer who had already won marked distinction in the field, two of the 38th Battery under Lieutenant Nesham; a pom-pom manned by regulars under Captain Geoghegan, and another attached to the Diamond Fields Horse.

His column—infantry and guns.

Mounted troops.

The mounted troops, 900 in number, and all irregulars, were of the most varied sort. A third were Yeomanry, composed of the 43rd and 86th Companies and a miscellaneous collection of details from the 5th Battalion. This part of the force was not in any sense a compact unit, and one company, the 86th, was a raw draft, unfit to take the field. The rest of the mounted troops were local levies. The Cape Police sent a good squadron under Major Berangé; the B.S.A. Police contributed a section of 24. Then came a number of small corps, containing a proportion of true Colonials, but mainly composed of surrendered Dutchmen with a sprinkling of coloured men. There were 64 of Cullinan's Horse, 92 of the Diamond Fields Horse, 58 of

Dennison's Scouts, 126 of Ashburner's Light Horse; lastly, a wholly coloured squadron of a corps known as the Cape Special Police (not to be confused with the "Cape Police"), recruited from Cape Boys and Bastards of the Colony. As scouts round a garrison town and even as scouts in the field, these corps had a distinct military value, but for fighting against De la Rey's veterans they were wholly unsuitable. As for the Cape Specials, their employment for war in the Transvaal was a mistake. Yet, such as they were, these corps constituted nearly two-thirds of the mounted arm, for offensive purposes the only arm which counted in the guerilla war. The column had no mobility worth the name. Destined for a long journey through one of the most desolate districts of the Transvaal, it was burdened with a train of 39 ox wagons and 46 mule wagons.

Methuen's plan.

The news that De la Rey, after capturing the convoy, was marching to the north-west, had suggested to Methuen that he was bent on gaining the Marico district, through the gap not yet blockhoused between Mafeking and Lichtenburg. Methuen's idea was to prevent this by converging with Kekewich upon Rooirantjesfontein, a point where several roads meet about 17 miles to the south of Lichtenburg. His own column, on March 2, was to advance north-east from Vryburg, whence the distance was 95 miles; Kekewich was to march from Klerksdorp, with a journey of about 60 miles; and the two columns were to meet on the 7th. Kekewich, it will be remembered, had already organised a flying column, 1,500 strong, under Colonel Grenfell. When Methuen's plan was made, this column was still afield, but as soon as it returned, Kekewich, in accordance with Methuen's request, commissioned Grenfell to start once more to the north-west. The arrangement raises a question of responsibility which needs some explanation. While keeping a tight centralised grasp on the great majority of the columns in South Africa, Kitchener had made certain exceptions. Methuen in the Western Transvaal, and French in Cape Colony, were given a free hand. When Methuen's expeditions had brought him within reach of other columns, he had been accustomed to assume their control without question, and during the last five months he had often called

upon Kekewich to co-operate. Otherwise that officer acted on orders from headquarters. On this occasion he wired for Kitchener's approval, which was given as a matter of course.

Methuen's march to Tweebosch, March 2–6.

On March 2 Methuen left Vryburg and marched north-east. The country before him, for some distance, was arid, his oxen were in bad condition, and doubt existed as to the places where water could be found. Progress, therefore, was slow. At the end of the second day, when the column camped at Grootpan, just on the Transvaal frontier, only 20 miles had been covered, and Methuen had to wire to Kekewich that he would be late. On the 5th, at Barber's Pan, rumours of the enemy came to hand, but so far only of one small force under Van Zyl of Bloemhof. Although Methuen was now only 35 miles from the proposed point of junction, the waterless state of the country still made it difficult to determine the direction of the march. Ultimately he resolved on a circuit to the south-east. On the 6th, accordingly, the column crossed the Great Hart's River at its junction with the Little Hart's, and, after dislodging Van Zyl, who had hovered round the column all day, camped at Tweebosch. The day had been marked by an ominous incident. Van Zyl on one occasion had sparred somewhat vigorously with Methuen's rear screen, composed of some Colonials and the 86th Yeomanry. It became evident at once that the troops were not efficient, the officers losing their heads and the men lacking coolness and fire discipline. A few shells from the 38th Battery dispersed the commando and Methuen in person restored order, but the impression left was unpleasant.

The situation, night of March 6.

That night, at Tweebosch, Methuen was definitely warned by his Intelligence officer that Van Zyl had joined a large Boer concentration under De la Rey; beyond that, all was uncertainty. Methuen had no news of Grenfell; Grenfell none of Methuen, and neither knew precisely where De la Rey was. Actually the positions were as follows:—Grenfell, starting from Rietkuil, near Klerksdorp, had reached Leeuwfontein. Leeuwfontein is 36 miles due east of Tweebosch, and both places are about equi-distant, 25 miles, from the point of junction, Rooirantjesfontein. Between the two camps was De la Rey hurrying hot-foot to fall on Methuen.

De la Rey's previous movements, Feb. 26–Mar. 6.

De la Rey had concentrated at Doornbult, 30 miles north-west of the scene of his last success and ten miles south of Rooirantjesfontein. Deducting Liebenberg's force, which had been left behind in the south, 1,100 men were present from the Lichtenburg, Krugersdorp and Rustenburg commandos, under Generals Celliers and Kemp, together with Van Zyl's detachment from Bloemhof, and the guns captured at Yzer Spruit. If De la Rey had wished to gain the Marico district, he could have done so twice over between February 25 and March 7. If, on the other hand, he chose to fight, he had the power, in his central position, to fall on either of the two British columns before their junction. There was little room for doubt as to which was the most vulnerable. Grenfell, moving light with 1,500 good mounted men, was just the sort of foe whom, on correct guerilla principles, he persistently avoided. Methuen's nondescript and heavily weighted force was a prey after his own heart.

Methuen marches from Tweebosch, March 7.

Early on the 7th both British columns marched north, and Grenfell, we may say at once, reached the rendezvous without incident. Methuen, having learnt that there was water at Leeuwkuil, 13 miles to the north-east of Tweebosch, made Leeuwkuil the objective for the day. In accordance with the usual practice, the column moved in two divisions. The ox convoy started at 3 A.M., escorted by the Cape Police, the 86th Yeomanry, all the infantry, two guns of the 4th Battery, and the R.F.A. pom-pom; the whole under Captain Geoghegan, R.A. An hour later the main column and the mule wagons started; the Cape Specials, Ashburner's Horse, and the Diamond Fields pom-pom forming the advance-guard, Dennison's Scouts and the Diamond Fields Horse the rear-guard.

Action of De Klip Drift, or Tweebosch, March 7.

For a few miles the march lay across the open, undulating plain in the angle formed by the Great and Little Hart's Rivers, both, at this season, wholly insignificant streams. About 5 A.M., when day had broken and the head of the column had reached De Klip Drift, on the Great Hart's River, De la Rey opened his attack by assailing the rear screen with a cloud of skirmishers. The screen was reinforced by the 38th Battery and the Diamond Fields pom-pom, whose fire for a short time was effectual. Methuen

now took steps to give more cohesion to his column. At 5.30 the ox convoy, which was a mile in front of the mule convoy, was ordered to halt, an order scarcely needed, for the terrified native drivers were already seeking cover underneath their wagons. At 6 o'clock, before the convoys had closed up, De la Rey's attack assumed serious proportions. While the direct pressure on the rear was steadily sustained, another movement was developed against the right flank and right rear. In accordance with an arrangement made previously, Methuen had stationed himself with the infantry, who were marching with the ox convoy, while Paris directed the mounted troops. To resist the latest attacks, Paris sent Ashburner's Horse and Cullinan's Horse to the rear-guard, and transferred from the advance-guard to the right flank part of the Cape Police. The 43rd Company and details of the 5th Battalion of Yeomanry formed an inner screen round the mule convoy, and, alongside the ox convoy, Methuen extended the infantry and brought into action the guns of the 4th Battery and the R.F.A. pom-pom. Meanwhile line after line of hostile horsemen, moving in widely extended order, but with remarkable regularity, came into view over the gentle rise which slopes to the river-bed. Reckless of the shells that both British batteries dropped among them, contemptuous of the ill-aimed, undisciplined rifle-fire of the screen, the Boers galloped into decisive range, flung themselves from their ponies, and pressed upon the British semi-circle. Paris, in the course of active endeavours to steady the mounted troops, ordered the 43rd Yeomanry to reinforce the right rear, where, if anywhere, the fire was hottest; but before the Yeomanry could gain the outer firing line the crisis of the action had come. It was about 6.30. De la Rey, whose handling of mounted riflemen on this, as on many other occasions, is well worth the study of tacticians, judged that the time had arrived for one of his thunderstrokes. He had thrown forward three successive lines of skirmishers; the fourth line, firing from the saddle, galloped straight home, impinging on and piercing the already tottering screen and overlapping it on the left rear. A rout ensued, shameful in one sense, natural enough if we consider the character and training of the medley of troops concerned. Nearly all the

Rout of the mounted troops.

Colonials broke and fled. Galloping down the slope in a disorderly mob, they met the reinforcing Yeomanry. Seasoned soldiers might well have caught the contagion of this miserable rout, and we can scarcely wonder that the Yeomanry failed to withstand it. Some held firm, however, and interposed a slight screen between the Boers and the mule-convoy. Meanwhile, the horde of fugitives swept along the left flank of both convoys, crossed the river, sucked into the current of flight the 86th Yeomanry and Cape Specials, who had not fired a shot, and never drew rein till they reached the top of a rise some three miles away. Few stopped for long even there. Of the troops who had lately composed the outer screen on the rear and right rear, nothing was left but Nesham's section of the 38th Battery and the Diamond Fields pom-pom, without a rifle to protect them. The latter managed to retire for the time being; the regulars fought where they stood to the bitter end. Nesham, the last survivor, declined to surrender and was shot dead.

The infantry and guns surrounded.

The Boer charge continued. On the right flank of the ox convoy it was brought to a stand by the disciplined fire of the infantry and guns, under Methuen's personal direction; on the flanks of the mule convoy, further to the rear, there was nothing to stop it but a thin line of Yeomanry, already shaken and bewildered by the spectacle of officers leading troops at a gallop to other quarters of the field. The Boers charged over the Yeomen, bore down on the mule wagons, which were already stampeding in disorder, and captured them. Then the whole of the enemy closed in upon the ox convoy standing in a confused mass close to the bed of the river, hedged by the scanty lines of infantry, with Venning's section of the 4th Battery and Geoghegan's pom-pom. Methuen had won the affection of these men in many a hard trek. At bay now, and on the verge of a disaster which nothing could avert, they proved themselves worthy of their leader. Extended on the gentle slopes on both sides of the river, they fired steadily and accurately; but they were surrounded on three sides by greatly superior numbers; they were decimated by plunging fire from the slopes and enfilading fire from the river. The gunners, destitute of cover and the chosen target of the enemy, fell man by man

at their posts. Like Nesham of the 38th, Venning was killed serving a gun.

End of the action.

Paris, in the meantime, was making strenuous but well-nigh fruitless efforts to recall the mounted men to their duty. About a mile further up the road, on rising ground above the east bank of the river, there was a cattle-kraal which he chose as rallying-point. But he could gather only forty brave men—Cape Police and Yeomanry—to hold the kraal. Hold it they did, however, though De la Rey sent Celliers with the Lichtenburg commando to surround this second nucleus of resistance and for the first time in the action brought into play against the kraal the three guns captured at Yzer Spruit. The fight in these two quarters lasted for another two hours. Then the cattle-kraal was rendered untenable and its few survivors capitulated. Round the convoy the situation was equally hopeless. The guns were silent; Methuen had been incapacitated by a severe wound, the infantry had suffered heavy losses, and surrender became inevitable.

Sequel to the action.

Grenfell was too far away to render assistance to Methuen. Hearing of the disaster on the next day, he decided that his best course was to reinforce the weak garrison of Lichtenburg, which De la Rey, with nine guns in his possession and large supplies of rifle-ammunition, might think of attacking. De la Rey, however, was not disposed to expend his limited resources in assaulting fortified towns. Breaking up his force, he left Celliers on the Hart's River, sent Kemp to the east, and proceeding in person to the south with 300 men and five guns, met de Wet and Steyn on the 17th at Zendelingsfontein, under the circumstances described in the last chapter. Before his departure, he took steps, according to his wont, to secure humane treatment for the prisoners taken at Tweebosch.* They were marched off to the Boer laager, given rations, and then sent away to the British lines at Kraai Pan. In the teeth of remon-

De la Rey meets de Wet and Steyn, March 17. (See p. 493.)

* At Yzer Spruit he had flogged several men for rough treatment of prisoners. A curious incident happened after the action of Tweebosch. De la Rey was conversing with Methuen, who was lying severely wounded in a tent. A burgher entered without ceremony and began, from the force of habit as it were, to remove the gaiter from Methuen's unwounded leg. He was dragged off and ejected by De la Rey himself!

strances from his subordinate officers, who argued, not unnaturally, that so important a hostage as the general should be kept in captivity, De la Rey insisted on showing the same clemency to Methuen, in consideration of his severe and painful wound. In the course of their long antagonism, each had learnt to respect the other as a gallant and chivalrous leader; nor could there be any more favourable omen of reconciliation between the two races than this generous act of De la Rey's. It must not be forgotten that the British authorities had threatened the Boer leaders with very different treatment. The proclamation of August 7, 1901, consigning them to perpetual banishment, had never been annulled. Scheepers, for good reasons, but for reasons which did not appeal to the Boers, had been shot.

Comments on the action.

The defeat at Tweebosch was absolute. Of the fighting strength of 1,300, 4 officers and 64 men were killed, 10 officers and 111 men wounded, about 600 were prisoners of war, and six guns were captured. Brightened by the brave stand of the regulars and a handful of irregulars, it must remain, nevertheless, a sad episode in our annals. Yet, viewed in a practical spirit by those who realise the terrible seriousness of war, it is but an example of the pitiless vengeance that overtakes attempts to make war with troops deficient in discipline, cohesion and moral. The responsibility is Methuen's; but the verdict of history upon him will not be too hard. Of all the senior officers upon whom the long strain of war had told with heavy effect, none had spent his strength and energy more lavishly than Methuen. The administrative work alone of his vast and remote district was enough to absorb all his time and labour. But, although his generalship was not on a high plane, he was a fighter by temperament, preferring to do a colonel's work in the field rather than a lieutenant-general's in the office. Thus it was that he came to leave Vryburg with a force whose pitiful weakness he did not realise. When signs of this weakness appeared, he might have turned back, but that was not his way. In the hour of disaster, he made all the atonement that was in his power, exposing himself freely and giving his men, as he had always given them, a fine example of fortitude.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FINAL STRUGGLE WITH DE LA REY

(March–April, 1902)

I

The First Steps toward Peace

On the news of Yzer Spruit, which reached headquarters while the second great drive in the Free State was drawing to its close, Kitchener had taken immediate steps to reinforce the Western Transvaal. The news of Methuen's reverse, arriving shortly before the end of the third drive, determined him to throw the full weight of his efforts against De la Rey. Botha and de Wet were incapable of further offensive efforts; De la Rey, with added prestige and resources far superior to those of any other leader in the two Boer states, was now the pivot of resistance. His force was small, 3,000 dependable and properly mounted men, at the utmost; but valiant and ably led, they made a fine stand against this final manifestation of Britain's might. Yet, even as they braced themselves for the struggle, the first steps were being taken which, ten weeks later, were to bring peace to their distracted country.

Kitchener resolves to turn against De la Rey.

But in the meantime the germ of peace has sprung up.

Tweebosch was not the only memorable event which happened on March 7, 1902. On the same day a messenger left Pretoria for the north, bearing a despatch from Kitchener to the Transvaal Government, which, as we saw at the end of Chapter XVI., was established at Stroomwater, in the bush veld. In order to explain the purport of this dispatch we must go as far back as January. On the 25th of that month, at the instance of Baron Kuyper, Prime Minister of the

The Dutch offer of mediation, Jan. 25, 1902.

Netherlands, Baron Gerické, the Dutch Ambassador in London, made a communication to Lord Lansdowne, in which it was proposed that the Government of the Netherlands should act as intermediary between Great Britain and the Boers. The document set forth that the Boer representatives in Europe were cut off from all communication with their generals and their Acting Government in the field and that their ignorance of the situation in South Africa precluded them from making any advances towards peace; further, that the European representatives were now on Dutch soil and directly accredited to the Dutch Government, so that if Great Britain were disposed to accept the good offices of a neutral power, that power naturally would be Holland. Should we agree to the principle of mediation, the specific suggestion was that the Dutch Government should ask the Boer representatives whether they would be willing to go to South Africa to deliberate with the leaders in the field and return to Europe armed with full powers to conclude a treaty of peace. If they consented, safe-conducts would have to be granted by the British Government for their free passage out, for their stay during an appointed period and for their return to Europe. On their return the Dutch Government would place them in communication with Great Britain, and would give facilities for the conduct of negotiations in Holland.

Lord Lansdowne refuses mediation, Jan. 29.

Lord Lansdowne, rightly voicing the opinion of his countrymen, replied on the 29th that the British Government, while appreciating the humane motives which inspired the Dutch proposals, adhered to their public announcement that no intervention of any foreign power would be accepted. If, however, the Boer representatives themselves desired to lay a request for a safe-conduct before His Majesty's Government, there was no reason why they should not do so. But, Lord Lansdowne pointed out, it was by no means clear that the delegates in Europe had any influence over the leaders in South Africa; on the contrary, full powers of government, including the power of negotiation, were believed to be vested in Mr. Steyn and Mr. Schalk Burger. If this was so it was clear that the quickest way to reach a settlement was by direct communication between

But hints at negotiation with the Boers.

these gentlemen and Lord Kitchener, who had already been instructed to forward any offers that he might receive. In any case, the Government had decided that negotiations for peace must take place, not in Europe, but in South Africa.

The first step, March 7.

It might well have seemed that this brief correspondence was a waste of paper and ink. Mediation was politely, but firmly declined; and the strong hint that a request from the Boer delegates to proceed to South Africa would have slight chances of success had its due effect in that no such request was made. But the reader will not have failed to note in Lord Lansdowne's words a marked declension from the attitude adopted in the proclamation of August 1901; and, indeed, the germ of peace had actually sprung into being. Kitchener was empowered to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Transvaal Government, and this copy formed the sole contents of the dispatch of March 7. It was accompanied by no explanation nor suggestion, nor indeed by a word of comment of any sort. This simple but carefully considered and profoundly diplomatic step had the desired effect. The Government was only too glad of an excuse for a parley, and in grasping at this particular excuse their face was saved. The dispatch seemed to them to savour of an invitation, almost of an overture. In the whole of the correspondence the word "independence" could not be discovered. Their dignity therefore was safe. The upshot was that Acting-President Schalk Burger requested a safe-conduct for himself and the other members of his Government into the British lines, and signified his desire for a meeting with the Free State Government with a view of framing in concert with them a proposal for peace. The safe-conduct was duly granted; on March 22 Mr. Burger and his colleagues entered the British lines at Balmoral, and on the 23rd, just a year and a week after the rupture of the Middelburg negotiations, they proceeded to Kroonstad.

The Transvaal Government enters the British lines, March 22.

The strange preliminary arrangements.

Thus began the strange preliminary arrangements for one of the strangest negotiations that ever took place. For the Boers, it was first of all necessary to collect persons qualified to decide whether it was advisable to negotiate, an object which could be effected only by the active good-will of their enemies.

De Wet, who had now returned to his own country, was within tolerably easy reach; but President Steyn was in De la Rey's camp in the Western Transvaal; De la Rey's business for the present was fighting, not negotiating; Botha was 250 miles away to the east; and Smuts, by no means an unimportant member of the Transvaal Government, was 600 miles to the west. Meanwhile, in the midst of assisting the Boer officials to find and assemble their friends, Kitchener prosecuted the war with unabated vigour. While the friendly search for de Wet was proceeding, a fourth drive swept over de Wet's country, and before word of the overtures could be carried to De la Rey and Steyn, Kitchener's newly assembled columns had moved —leapt, rather, at one spring—into De la Rey's domains. The conflict in this quarter was one of peculiar moment. Although the news of Methuen's defeat, received after their entry into the British lines, had not as yet affected the action of the Transvaal Government, the sequel, whatever it might be, was bound to influence the current of events. So opens the last and most dramatic page in the history of the guerilla war.

Importance of the campaign in the West.

II

Boschbult

The concentration of British troops, March.

Not since the end of July, 1901, had Klerksdorp been such a hive of activity. During the second and third weeks of March, troop trains by the score discharged their freights of men, horses and guns, and camps sprang into being all round the little town. Kekewich was there strengthening and reorganising his command; Rawlinson's entire force, after a fruitless chase of de Wet and Steyn, marched to the new base; Keir, Wilson and Damant came from the work they had scarcely begun in the Eastern Transvaal; Du Cane left Barker's group in the Free State; Colonel Vialls, the energetic Australian who had served so long under Plumer,* brought a force of M.I.; the newly-raised Canadian

* Plumer's command had just been broken up.

Mounted Rifles, 900 strong, under Colonel Evans, three battalions of infantry and large numbers of Yeomanry and M.I., were drawn from all quarters to the same busy centre. Lastly, Rochfort's group of columns, hitherto operating in the Southern and Western Free State, crossed the Vaal and encamped at Commando Drift.

Organisation.

Following the system adopted in the recent drives in the Free State, the troops, 16,000 in number, were distributed in four divisions, each about 4,000 strong.

(1) Rawlinson retained the same force, divided into three columns under Colonels Briggs, Scott and Dawkins.

(2) Kekewich controlled two columns under Colonels Grenfell and von Donop.*

(3) Major-General Walter Kitchener, after four months' leave of absence, resumed active work in control of a force composed of Keir's three-fold group, the Canadian Mounted Rifles, Vialls's M.I., Du Cane's column, two battalions of infantry, and miscellaneous detachments of M.I. and Yeomanry. The force was organised in three columns under Colonels Keir, Cookson and Lowe.†

(4) Rochfort's group, strengthened considerably for the present occasion, now consisted of columns under Colonels Lord Basing, Western and Sitwell, and

* Kekewich's Force :—

(1) Grenfell's Column.—1st and 2nd Scottish Horse, 500 ; 7th Battalion I.Y., 190; 27th, 48th, 107th and 108th Cos. I.Y., 420; S.A.C., 300; 2nd Norfolk Regt., 120; two guns; two pom-poms.

(2) Von Donop's Column.—Detachments from 10th, 11th and 21st M.I., 300; detachments from 5th and 10th Battalions I.Y., 470; Divisional Scouting Corps, 80; Australian Bushmen, 25; B.S.A. Police, 10; 2nd National Scouts, 500; Norfolk Regt., 120; two guns : two pom-poms.

(3) 1st Cameron Highlanders, 900 (added March 28).

† Walter Kitchener's Force :—

(1) Keir's Column.—R.H.A. Mounted Rifles, 750; 2nd Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, 150; 28th M.I., 500; two guns 78th Battery.

(2) Cookson's Column.—30th, 31st and 93rd Squadrons I.Y.; Canadian Mounted Rifles, 900; Damant's Horse, 300; two pom-poms; two guns 78th Battery.

(3) Lowe's Column.—27th M.I., 300; 17th M.I., 300; 2nd M.I., 100; 29th, 30th, 31st, 49th Cos. I.Y., 300; two guns 78th Batt.; one pom-pom.

(4) 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Majors Bulfin, Vaughan and Reynolds, together with Driscoll's Scouts.*

The driving problem.

While the rapid and orderly concentration of all these troops was an exceedingly fine performance, the problem of using them effectively was by no means easy. Owing to the comparative paucity of blockhouse lines and hence of advanced bases and barriers, drives on the newly invented system were far more difficult to organise than in de Wet's district. For example, it was 160 miles from the Schoon Spruit line of blockhouses westward to Vryburg, and 115 miles from Lichtenburg due south to the Vaal. In order to produce any useful effect, it was apparent that the driving-line must be absolutely unencumbered, and must move with the utmost speed. Hence came to be planned one of the most remarkable of the many remarkable movements of the guerilla war.

Map, Western Transvaal, end of chap. xx.

Kitchener's scheme.

In the third week of March the Intelligence having reported that large numbers of Boers were within thirty miles of the Schoon Spruit, Kitchener ordered that 11,000 mounted men should pass secretly and swiftly, in one night march of forty miles, to the westward of the commandos, then turn to the right-about, deploy in driving formation, and in one day drive back to the Schoon Spruit line of blockhouses. Eighty miles were to be covered in twenty-four hours. Kekewich on the extreme north was to start from Vaalbank, on the Schoon Spruit-Lichtenburg blockhouse line; Rawlinson and W. Kitchener from Klerksdorp; Rochfort, on the extreme south, from Commando Drift. On the night of the 23rd, riding in close order, without guns or transport, the columns shot out into the veld.

The columns start, March 23.

The report that there were many Boers within the

* Rochfort's Force:—

(1) Lord Basing.—Royal Dragoons; one pom-pom.

(2) Western.—2 Cos. I.Y.; 2nd Royal Sussex Regt., 300; 2nd Black Watch, 160; 2nd R. West Kent Regt., 70; 2nd R.I. Rifles, 150; one gun 82nd Battery; one pom-pom.

(3) Sitwell.—22nd M.I., 300; 24th I.Y., 360; 2nd Bedford Regt., 170; 3rd Highland L.I., 200; one gun 82nd Battery; one pom-pom.

(4) Bulfin.—16th M.I., 320; 59th Co. I.Y., 90; two guns 17th Battery.

(5) Vaughan.—400 S.A.C.

(6) Reynolds.—500 S.A.C.

threatened area was correct. It will be remembered that after his action with Methuen, De la Rey, with 300 men and five guns, had ridden to meet de Wet and Steyn at Zendelingsfontein. De Wet had immediately returned to the Free State; but De la Rey and Steyn, with the small escort of the latter, were still in the same neighbourhood. Kemp, with 400 men and two of the guns brought south, was twelve miles further to the west, at Klipfontein. Lastly, Liebenberg, to whom De la Rey had handed over the 300 men and the three remaining guns, had been for the last month, and was now, in his old hunting-grounds near Wolmaransstad with eight or nine hundred men at call. A few hundred stray burghers scattered at large over the area, must also be taken into account. Save Steyn alone, none of the leaders and men concerned had ever experienced a taste of the new model drive, and all were unconscious of any immediate danger. It will be observed, moreover, that the three principal bands were all in the southern part of the area.

The Boers within the net.

(See p. 507.)

All night long the British columns trotted rapidly to their destinations, Rochfort riding north, the others west. At dawn they halted and deployed on an arc of ninety miles. If we consider that only one division, Rawlinson's, had ever before been practised, as a complete unit, in the new driving system, and that the system itself had never before been pushed to such ambitious extremes, in the matter either of distance, extent of front or speed, it must be acknowledged that the manœuvre was astonishingly well performed. Nevertheless, the line had fallen into some disorder and several small parties of men had been lost in the darkness. Kekewich's right and Rawlinson's left were duly linked up at Geluk; but Rawlinson's right and W. Kitchener's left, designed to meet at Gestoptefontein, were not in touch; nor had W. Kitchener's right and Rochfort's left, designed to meet at Zwartrand, succeeded in effecting a junction when the time came to deploy. The Boers, meanwhile, had been thrown into great bewilderment by this stealthy scurry of columns through their midst. De la Rey and Steyn, with their small escort, rode unnoticed out of the net in the early hours of

Outward ride of the British.

March 24, A.M.

De la Rey and Steyn escape easily.

Kemp less easily.

the 24th, thanks, possibly, to Steyn's hardly earned experience of the new model drive. Kemp, as much by luck as by skill, also escaped unscathed. In the course of W. Kitchener's night march to the west, Keir and Lowe had passed within earshot of his laager, one on either side. Kemp saddled up, followed in their wake, watched them deploy at dawn, and then passed round their flank through the gap still unfilled between Rochfort and Keir.

Liebenberg with great difficulty.

Liebenberg's adventures were far more perilous. Thoroughly perplexed as to the nature of the British manœuvres, he had gathered his men during the night in the Makwassiberg and had struck away to the north; so that at sunrise, when the driving-line began the return march eastward, he was still within the cordon. At 6 A.M., having passed Kitchener's left, he was sighted by Rawlinson's right at Holfontein and hustled still further to the north and east by Briggs and the I.L.H.

Liebenberg's hair's-breadth escape, March 2 P.M.

Anxious to preserve his guns and wagons, he shrank from all contact and hurried on, bearing more and more to the east as the driving-line closed in. At 4.30 P.M. he was at Buisfontein, only seven miles from the Schoon Spruit blockhouse line and close to the point where Kekewich's right and Rawlinson's left joined hands. His draught beasts were dead beat, his men and horses far gone in exhaustion; the scouts reported troops everywhere to the west and south, and blockhouses everywhere to the north and east. Liebenberg bowed to the inevitable, abandoned his wagons and guns, which on the next day fell into the hands of Kekewich, roused up his tired burghers, whose number, by local accretion, had swelled to nearly 1,000, and, moving southward, sought for an outlet. This was easier now, for the southern part of the British line, under intolerable physical strain, had lost all semblance of continuity. The generals had found it impossible to reach the Schoon Spruit or to form an intrenched line for the night, so that about 5 o'clock, in drenching rain, Rochfort's and Kitchener's columns encamped in the old style about ten miles from the blockhouse line. Two hours later Liebenberg's men, still within the cordon, threw themselves down to rest in the kloofs of Rhenoster-

berghoek, only a couple of miles away. Their leader was on the verge of despair, when the scouts reported wide gaps in the British line. At midnight, roused up anew for a last effort, the commando stole out of the trap between the sleeping camps.

Results of the drive.

Thus ended the drive, with a reward of eight Boers killed, 165 prisoners, three guns and two pom-poms. Kekewich returned to Vaalbank, Rochfort to the south of the Vaal, W. Kitchener and Rawlinson to Klerksdorp. On the Boer side, De la Rey, Kemp and Liebenberg all joined Celliers on the Hart's River and by the 27th had concentrated to the number of 2,500 men, the largest Boer gathering that had been seen in the field of war for more than a year past. De la Rey was thoroughly roused. Never till now had he seen such an output of British force in the Western Transvaal; never till now such strange and baffling tactics.

Steyn consents to meet the Transvaal Government, March 27.

On this day, the 27th of March, a messenger reached the Boer camp bearing a letter for President Steyn. It was from Mr. Schalk Burger, announcing that the Executive Council of the Transvaal Government was desirous of discussing a proposal of peace and that its members had gone to Kroonstad, under a safe-conduct from Lord Kitchener, for the purpose of meeting and conferring with the Free State Government. The letter went on to ask when and where this conference could take place. Steyn replied on the same day that he and his Council were willing to meet the Transvaalers, and suggested that Klerksdorp or Potchefstroom would be a suitable meeting-place. It was not, however, till April 5 that Steyn received an answer naming Klerksdorp as the rendezvous, together with a safe-conduct from Kitchener for his passage to that town. In the meantime De la Rey had fought another battle.

The problem of field control especially urgent

We have often pointed out that British operations suffered from the absence of strong control exercised on the spot The fact was to become painfully prominent during the last week of March. It is true that in the drive just concluded no system of control could have seriously affected the issue. Once the columns were let slip for a manœuvre of such mighty scope and lightning swiftness, a supreme field-

commander would have been as powerless as the central office was powerless. But on the morrow of the drive the situation was different and in some respects peculiar. Instead of scattering to the four winds, in anticipation of further trouble, the Boers had concentrated, and were known to have concentrated. It was reported that 3,000 men—a somewhat high estimate—were gathered somewhere on the line of the Hart's River, and against this force 16,000 British troops could be rapidly assembled. In a word, the conditions for the moment bore some resemblance to those of regular war. The natural course would have been to unite these troops under one strong commander and to launch them against De la Rey. But Kitchener was faced with the outcome of his own system. Until a fortnight ago, when each received 4,000 men, none of the four group-commanders now facing De la Rey had commanded more than 3,000 men; nor had their schooling under Kitchener's centralised rule trained them for the sudden assumption of high responsibility. It was the same with leaders elsewhere; men fitted for the post, whether senior or junior, were lacking. Though, happily, a solution was soon to be found, the last week in March, while the system so long in vogue was being applied under peculiarly unfavourable conditions, was one of the most critical in the war. It would not have taken much to wreck the prospects of peace.

The divisions to advance *en échelon*, March 28–31.

An old difficulty hampered the formation of a plan. De la Rey's precise position was not known. Colonel Woolls-Sampson, who had been attached to Kekewich's force, placed him at Barber's Pan; other intelligence officers further to the south and east. When Kitchener conferred with the group-commanders on March 26 at Klerksdorp, the measures adopted reflected this uncertainty. Rochfort was to be left on the Vaal, while the rest marched successively westward. Kekewich, starting from Vaalbank on the 28th, was directed to Middelbult, near the source of the Little Hart's; W. Kitchener, leaving Klerksdorp on the 29th, was to go to Driekuil, near the source of the Brak Spruit; and Rawlinson, held back till the 31st, was then to march only as far as Rhenoster Spruit, sixteen miles west of Klerksdorp. At

these three points intrenched camps were to be formed which, in the absence of blockhouse lines, might serve as advanced depôts for operations further west. This object excepted, no defined strategy inspired the scheme. It was hoped, however, that by the 30th one of the two northern forces would gain touch with the enemy and clear up the situation.

Kekewich finds nothing, March 29–30.

Kekewich, reaching Middelbult on the 29th and reconnoitring to the south and west on the following day, found nothing. W. Kitchener arrived at Rietvlei on the evening of the 30th, and for the following morning ordered a reconnaissance to the west. While Lowe's column and the infantry marched to Driekuil to form the intrenched camp, Cookson and Keir, the former in command, with 1,800 mounted men, four guns and two pom-poms, were to reconnoitre along the course of the Brak Spruit as far as its junction with the Great Hart's River, a distance from Rietvlei of forty miles, over level country sprinkled with bush. The Brak Spruit, we should add, is at best an insignificant stream, and at this season was practically dry.

W. Kitchener orders a reconnaissance for the 31st.

Cookson's reconnaissance starts, March 31,

Cookson, with the force given below,* started at 2 A.M. on the morning of the 31st, his men carrying two days' rations upon them, with supplies for an additional day in mule wagons. Major Cameron, with the left wing of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, was placed in charge of the transport, and the rest of the force, with parties of Damant's Horse and the Canadians in advance, moved rapidly westward. At 10 A.M., near the farm Doornlaagte, the scouts struck the trail of a commando; gun-tracks were found, and dust was seen in the distance. Holding back the Canadian right wing with orders to wait for the left wing and transport, Cookson launched his main body in hot pursuit, with Damant's Horse leading. The spoor was followed at a hand-gallop along the course of the Brak Spruit. At Boschpan Damant gained touch and without drawing rein drove the quarry westward to Boschbult.

* Evans's Canadian Mounted Rifles; Damant's Horse; Mercer's R.H.A. Mounted Rifles: 28th M.I. (Major Laurie); Kitchener's Fighting Scouts (Colonel Wilson); two weak companies of Yeomanry; four guns 78th Battery; two pom poms.

Here there was a sudden check. The commando reached supports and, facing round, suddenly opened a heavy fire from an expanse of bush to the front. At the same moment Boers appeared on the gently rising ground to right and left, on both sides of the spruit. Cookson began to suspect, not without secret exultation, that his "reconnaissance" had committed him to a general action against considerable force.

and runs into a Boer concentration.

He was right. For the last few days De la Rey's headquarters had been at Roodewal, near the junction of the two streams, while his commandos were quartered at various points in the neighbourhood, within short call. Sudden as Cookson's incursion was, the small force which had retired before him soon communicated with others; so that within a few hours 2,500 of the best fighters in the Western Transvaal, under the best senior leaders—Kemp, Celliers and Liebenberg—rode to the scene of action.

Action of Boschbult, March 31.

Damant had been checked on the farm lands of Boschbult, at the western limit of a wide clearing in the sea of bush. As it was essential that the whole column should gain the free field of fire presented by this clearing, Keir, with the R.H.A. Mounted Rifles and Kitchener's Horse, was sent to hold the Boers on the rising ground on the left; while Damant, with Damant's Horse, the Yeomanry and the 28th M.I., protected the front and right. In this way the ground was easily maintained until the arrival, about midday, of the Canadians and transport. Cookson had already resolved to camp on the banks of the Brak Spruit. His force had covered thirty-five miles since 2 A.M. in the morning, and at Boschbult some pools in the otherwise parched river-bed offered facilities for watering man and beast. The wagons were parked near a farmhouse close to the water's edge, the mules and horses were placed in the dry bed of the spruit, and in preparation for a severe defensive action, intrenching was begun. Half-a-mile further to the east, another farmhouse, also close to the river, was occupied as a detached post by Major Lecky and 200 of the R.H.A. Mounted Rifles and a pom-pom. In the meantime, the outer screen was maintained, but in a much modified form. Keir, with Kitchener's Horse and the rest of the R.H.A. Mounted Rifles,

Map, p. 523.

Cookson's dispositions.

was drawn in close to the camp, which he protected on the south. North of the camp the Yeomanry were withdrawn and a reduced screen was formed by the 28th M.I. under Major Laurie, and a single company of Damant's Horse under Captain Scott. These troops directly faced a great expanse of bush. Lastly there must be mentioned a party of thirty Canadians under Lieutenant Carruthers, posted in observation to the north-east of the camp.

The Boers attack, 1.20 P.M.

Tools being few and the ground hard, the work of intrenchment went on slowly, and at 1.20 P.M., before it was nearly complete, the Boers made their first serious attack. Bringing up four guns and a pom-pom to the scrub-covered ground to the south-west, they began to shell the camp, with the result that some of the mule-drivers inspanned their wagons and began a stampede. The panic was quelled and the wagons rounded up, but not before a few vehicles had run amuck through the 28th M.I., causing the men of one company to lose their heads. Before this company could be rallied it was isolated by a Boer charge. Seizing what appeared to be a favourable moment, Liebenberg, with several hundred men, galloped out from behind the Boer guns, swept across the front of the laager, and charged down in the direction of farm C. Recoiling under the fire of Keir's troops extended on the south bank, they swerved away wide to the east; then, wheeling to their left, bore down upon the farm from the north-east. It was a spirited charge on the best Boer model; but Liebenberg, it would appear, had not counted on finding the farm occupied and intrenched. Lecky's R.H.A. Mounted Rifles, ensconced in the farm buildings and enclosure, brought the charge to an abrupt end by a steady volume of fire reserved till the enemy was at point-blank range. Swerving once again, the Boers cut off and drove from the field the broken company of M.I. to which we referred above, and disappeared in the bush to the north of the camp. Here they joined Kemp and Celliers, and all together directed a long-range fire upon the northern British screen.

Danger of the outer screen.

This screen, without a particle of cover and without any appliances for intrenchment, remained for another hour and

a half in a situation of some peril. But at 3.30 the defences of the main camp were in a fair way to completion, and Cookson was able to give permission for the whole screen to retire. It was a difficult manœuvre to execute, for the first sign of retirement was certain to be the signal for a Boer charge. Unfortunately, moreover, two companies of the 28th M.I., having recently sent their horses to water in the spruit, were compelled to retreat on foot. Directly the troops were in motion the Boers emerged from the bush 1,000 yards distant and charged. Damant's Horse effected a safe retirement, and two companies of M.I., covering one another alternately, did the same; but the remaining three broke. Some of the men were shot down, some were captured, and some passed in disorder through the small detachment of Canadians under Lieutenant Carruthers. Here only five or six men gave way, while a gallant band of twenty-one, under Lieutenant Carruthers, Sergeants Perry and Hodgkins, and Corporal Wilkinson, held firm and were overwhelmed, fighting bravely to the last.

Its retirement.

Easily as they had driven in the screen, the Boers were roughly checked before the laager and farm C, whence a great volume of fire swept across the level plain. Three hours of hard work had placed the main position in a good state of defence. Trenches, shallow but fairly serviceable, had been dug and trip-wires had been laid out. Although there was no natural cover save the little afforded by the shallow bed of the spruit, there was a fine field of fire and no cover whatsoever for the Boer riflemen. Topographically, indeed, the only Boer advantage was the possession of a bush-clothed hill to the south-west, whence they could fire their guns into the camp, without effective reply from the British artillery. Shells, indeed, pitched frequently within the British lines; but the aim was better than the fusing, and it was only among the crowded rows of horses and mules that much damage was done. Meanwhile the fire-attack of the Boer riflemen, delivered from tolerably long ranges but upon a compact target, was hotly sustained for another hour and a quarter and caused considerable loss. Nor, owing to the distance and the less accurate shooting of the

The Boers checked before the main position.

British troops, was this fire-attack costly. But if their marksmanship was indifferent, the spirit of Cookson's force was wholly admirable. So cool and resolute was the defence that the Boers, greatly superior as their strength was, never attempted an assault. Where all did thoroughly well, a particular word of praise is due to the Canadians, who in this action were receiving their baptism of fire. The resolute defence.

De la Rey himself arrived on the field late, and as soon as he gauged the tenacity of the defence, broke off the attack. It is possible that he was influenced by a rumour of British reinforcements, to which we shall soon refer; but apart from such a motive, it was against his military principles to expend lives and ammunition in an assault upon an intrenched camp resolutely held, unless, indeed, as at Moedwil, the assault were a surprise. There is reason to believe that Kemp, his second-in-command, had already exceeded orders in forcing an action; and indeed the best opportunity for Boer tactics had come and gone before the commandos were concentrated, while Cookson was still parking his convoy and forming his camp. At 5 o'clock the Boer fire slackened abruptly, and soon afterwards ceased altogether. The repulse.

General Walter Kitchener, with Lowe's mounted column and the infantry, had reached Driekuil, twenty miles distant from Boschbult, in the morning, and had begun the formation of a permanent camp. Several messengers sent by Cookson to his chief failed to get through. In the afternoon, however, warned by the boom of distant guns that Cookson was seriously engaged, Kitchener ordered out Lowe's column of 1,000 M.I. and Yeomanry, with three guns, and marched westward. At Doornlaagte, a third of the way to Boschbult, the column met a party of scared fugitives from Cookson's force—natives, a Dutch guide and some mounted infantry—from whose hazy, but exceedingly gloomy reports, Kitchener gathered that Cookson's camp had been rushed and overwhelmed. The sound of firing had ceased, night was drawing on and the bush was a source of so much embarrassment that he decided to return to Driekuil and defer action till the next day. Reaching camp, he wired to headquarters Walter Kitchener's movements.

that as far as his information went Cookson's force was destroyed, and at the same time sent a message to Rawlinson, who had just left Klerksdorp, to lend him assistance by moving at once on Driekuil.

Happily, Cookson was in no urgent need of reinforcements. All the evening and night untiring efforts were made to improve the defences of the camp, but the attack was not renewed. On the next day, the 1st of April, Boers again appeared in force to the north, and again disappeared on the news of a relieving column. At 1 o'clock W. Kitchener arrived on the scene.

The relief, April 1.

Casualties.

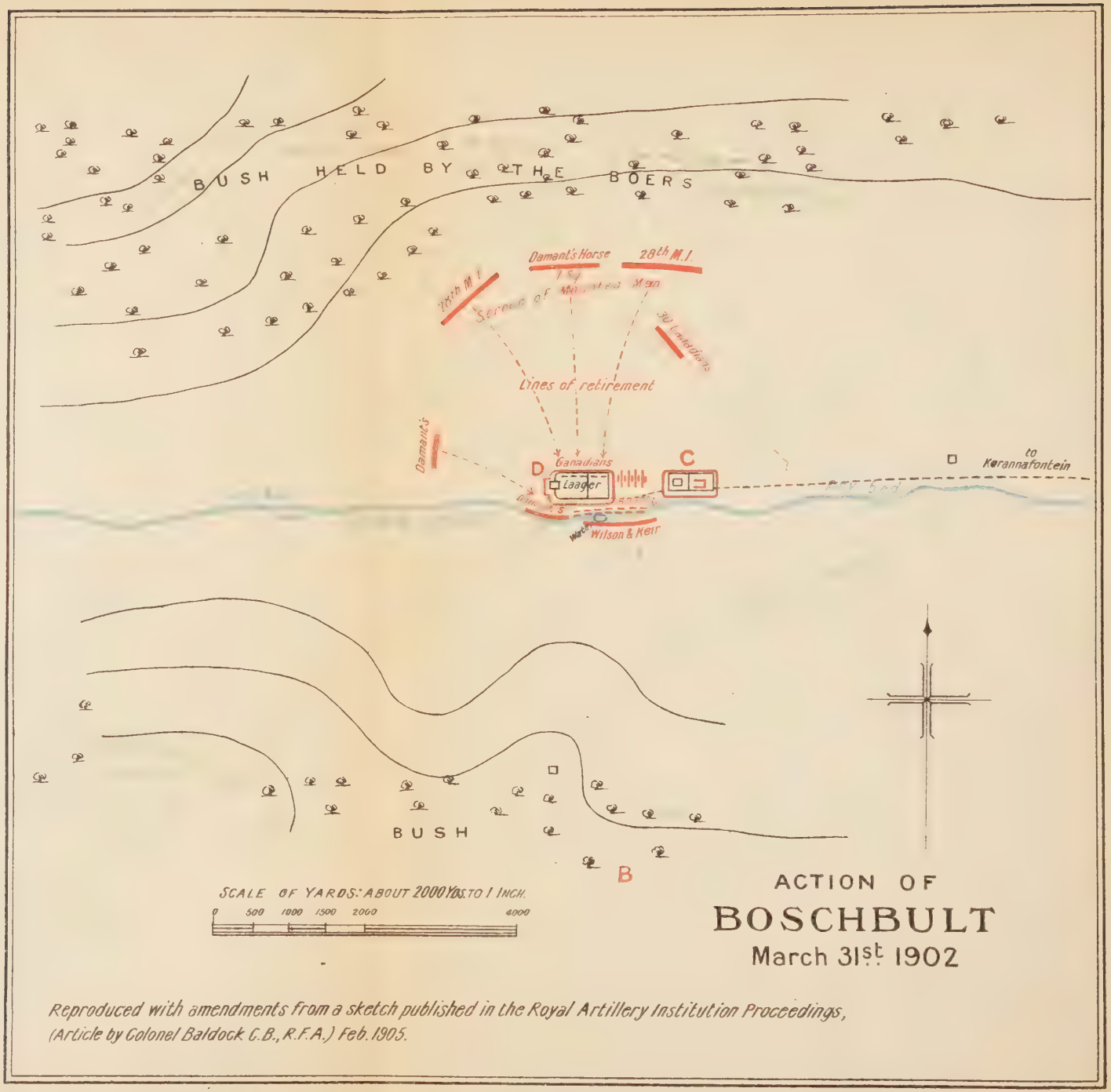
The British casualties were 178, ten per cent. of the force engaged, the heaviest loss falling on the Canadians, who had 67 killed and wounded. About a hundred men of the M.I. were captured and released. No less than 400 horses and mules had been killed in the British lines, so that the mobility of the force was for the time much impaired. On the Boer side the casualties, which occurred principally in Liebenberg's first charge, seem to have been at the utmost 90. Two hours after Kitchener's arrival the united forces left camp and reached Driekuil on the 2nd. Rawlinson, in response to Kitchener's message, had already arrived.

The strategical chaos.

Thus ended the first collision with De la Rey. If it brought out the fine fighting qualities of the British soldier it did not reflect credit on British strategy. At this stage of a war, with so mobile a foe as the Boer, a reconnaissance in force was an anachronism. Even if Cookson's first messages had got through to Driekuil, no strategical use could have been made of them; for on that day Rawlinson was only leaving Klerksdorp, while W. Kitchener and Kekewich, owing to the vicious system of control then in vogue, were acting at cross-purposes. Kekewich, at Middelbult, had drawn up a plan for combined action by himself and W. Kitchener, which he submitted to Pretoria by telegraph on the 31st. Receiving Lord Kitchener's sanction, he proceeded, on April 1, to carry out his own share of the plan. Unable to obtain signalling communication with Driekuil, he had sent an officer to W. Kitchener with instructions for co-operation. But W. Kitchener, meanwhile, had sent out

DIRECTIONS

A Slightly rising ground from which Boer guns fired
B Keir's original position, before the first attack
C Outlying farm defended by R.H.A.M.R.
D Farm and Laager (main position)



ACTION OF BOSCHBULT
March 31st 1902

Reproduced with amendments from a sketch published in the Royal Artillery Institution Proceedings, (Article by Colonel Baldock C.B., R.F.A.) Feb. 1905.

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Cookson's expedition, and on April 1 was engaged in extricating his lieutenant. In the full belief that W. Kitchener was going to converge with him on the junction of the Great and Little Hart's Rivers, where Woolls-Sampson had placed De la Rey, Kekewich marched to that point, found no co-operating force and no Boers, and returned to Middelbult on the 2nd. Nor was this all. By one of those fatalities which sometimes happen at critical moments, communication broke down between W. Kitchener and headquarters. His message to the effect that Cookson had probably been overwhelmed reached Pretoria on the morning of the 31st. Then there was silence for forty hours, while the fate of the detached force was unknown and no central strategy could be initiated.

Sir Ian Hamilton takes command.

The conclusion was irresistible. Unity of command in the field was an imperative necessity, and the fact was nowhere more clearly recognised than among the four divisional commanders in the Western Transvaal. It was with the backing of their joint request that Kitchener at last decided to send down an officer to take the supreme command. The officer selected was Lieut.-General Sir Ian Hamilton, for four months past Kitchener's Chief of Staff. In that capacity, as we have already pointed out, he had been of great service to Kitchener, and he could now be spared for a not less important service. In one respect, the choice was remarkable. Although his recent experience at headquarters, aided by a naturally quick intelligence, had given him insight, not only into the latest military methods, but into the character and capacity of the men who administered them, Sir Ian Hamilton himself had not held a field command for seventeen months. All the officers whom he was now called upon to control had been bearing the burden and heat of the day, more or less continuously, during the whole of that period. Hamilton was compelled to rely largely on their experience, resource, energy and executive ability. These were placed ungrudgingly at his service, and in return he brought what was the great need of the hour, the gift of high command, exercised, not indeed faultlessly, but always for vigorous ends.

He reaches Middelbult on April 8.

He lost no time in getting to work. Receiving his first orders at Pretoria on the morning of April 6, he took train for Klerksdorp at 10 P.M., with one staff officer, Captain Victor Brooke, for companion and the contents of a buggy for baggage, reached Klerksdorp on the afternoon of the 7th, and Kekewich's headquarters at Middelbult on the evening of the 8th. In a few hours a plan was formed; on the 9th its execution was begun; and on the morning of the 11th one of the critical actions of the war was fought.

III

The Meeting of the Two Boer Governments

Before proceeding further we must turn aside for an instant to lift the curtain on a very different scene. Steyn's suggestion (in his letter of March 27 from De la Rey's headquarters on the Hart's River) that Klerksdorp should be the meeting-place for the Transvaal and Free State Governments, had been agreed to, and Steyn, taking De la Rey and the members of his council with him, travelled under a safe-conduct to Klerksdorp, arriving on April 9. Thus, by an unfortunate coincidence for the Boers of the west, they lost their own general just when the British gained theirs. At Klerksdorp the party found Louis Botha and the Transvaal Government, who had arrived two days before. De Wet was present also; and thus, in the very town which was the British base of operations for the culminating struggle of the war and on the very day these operations began, the first tentative views were exchanged between the Boer leaders on the momentous question of peace.

Meeting of the two Governments, April 9.

The two Governments, who, although they were treated with all kindness and courtesy, were closely watched and quartered in different parts of the town, met together at 3 o'clock on April 9 in a large tent erected between the old and new towns. There were present: from the Transvaal:—Acting-President Schalk Burger, Commandant-General Louis Botha, with his private secretary, N. de Wet, State Secretary F. W. Reitz, General De la Rey, and Messrs. Lukas

Meyer, G. C. Krogh, L. Jacobsz and J. Ferreira. From the Orange Free State:—President M. T. Steyn, with his private secretary, B. J. Du Plessis, Acting State Secretary W. J. C. Brebner, General C. de Wet, Judge J. B. M. Hertzog and General C. H. Olivier.

For the Transvaal Mr. D. van Velden acted as secretary; for the Free State, Mr. J. D. Kestell, Steyn's chaplain.*

Their conference.

The proceedings began with prayer. Then Mr. Burger explained the circumstances which had brought about the meeting, and asked the generals to describe the state of the country and the condition of the commandos. Botha, de Wet and De la Rey having spoken, the meeting adjourned. On the 10th, though they scarcely realised it, the delegates crossed the Rubicon. It was resolved to negotiate, and the fundamental question was thus decided. Lord Kitchener was to be requested to meet the Governments in order to receive from them a "proposal of peace." The request, forwarded by telegraph to Kitchener, was promptly granted, and on the same evening the delegates travelled to Pretoria, where they were received once more with every mark of consideration and hospitality. Here, for the present, we leave them, somewhat ill at ease, perhaps, as to the nature of the mysterious communication now reposing in Mr. Burger's pocket, but, on the whole, well content to breathe the atmosphere of negotiation.

They decide to negotiate, April 10,

and go to Pretoria.

IV

Roodewal

Ian Hamilton's scheme, April 8.

When Ian Hamilton arrived at Middelbult an abortive movement by Rawlinson and Kekewich had just concluded. Woolls-Sampson, almost infallible in the Eastern Transvaal, but not so familiar with the West, had again advised a night raid to Barber's Pan. On April 6–7 this was carried out by a long, rapid and admirably organised march; but the news

* The author is much indebted, in describing the negotiations for peace, to Mr. Kestell's work, 'Through Shot and Flame,' as well as to his appendix to General de Wet's book, 'The Three Years' War.'

of the Boer force proved to be false and the columns returned empty-handed. Hamilton now found Kekewich and Rawlinson at Middelbult and W. Kitchener at Driekuil, eighteen miles south. Rochfort for the present was not placed under Hamilton and continued for another month to operate on the Vaal, where, as it turned out, there was very little to do. There were supplies for only four days, a period just sufficient for one big movement, if begun without any delay. In these four days, beginning on the 9th, Hamilton's plan was to sweep round to the south and east in a semicircle of 140 miles, by the Great Hart's River and the Vaal, and so to Klerksdorp. The first day was to be devoted to preliminary movements. At the end of the second day the troops were to take up an intrenched line on the Brak Spruit, with the right touching the Great Hart's. On the third day they were to march due south for forty miles; and on the fourth to swing round to the east, till the right touched the Vaal, and then to drive to Klerksdorp.

Its execution, Apr. 9–10.

The main stress of this big undertaking was designed to fall on Kekewich, whose division formed the right of the line, while Rawlinson formed the centre and W. Kitchener the left. On the 9th, in order to prepare for the southerly extension, Kekewich marched to Noordshulp and Rawlinson to Driekuil, where he joined W. Kitchener; and on the 10th the whole force moved into position on the south bank of the Brak Spruit and further to the east. Kekewich, however, owing to the loss of a staff-message, took the wrong direction, and, instead of encamping on the most westerly section of the Brak Spruit, with his right touching the Hart's, found himself in the afternoon at Boschpan, ten miles too far to the east and immediately in rear of Rawlinson, whose line stretched from Oshoek over Boschpan to Doornpan. Further to the east, Kitchener's extreme left touched Kliprif. Although it was too late wholly to correct the mistake, Kekewich in the course of the evening moved further west, so that when night fell his right rested on the eastern part of the farm Roodewal, some three miles from the Hart's, while his left was in touch with Rawlinson's right at Oshoek. When the line was forming in the afternoon and intrenching

for the night, Boers in force appeared on the left, facing W. Kitchener, and demonstrated very openly, but no attack was made. The night passed quietly and dawn broke on one of the most interesting situations that occurred in the whole war.

Kemp's force, April 10.

Fully cognizant of the momentous issue now at stake and undiscouraged by the repulse at Boschbult, Kemp, in De la Rey's absence, had made strenuous efforts to strengthen and consolidate his force. When all was done, however, the accession of strength was small, perhaps a hundred at the utmost. The best and keenest men were already there, and although an urgent summons was sent to the Marico and Zwartruggens commandos, which had long been reduced to inactivity by lack of horses, Van Tonder and Van Heerden succeeded in gathering only a small band of men, who, in point of fact, arrived too late. On April 10, therefore, Kemp had within reach about 2,600 men, divided into three groups under Liebenberg, Celliers and Potgieter,* the last-named having succeeded to Kemp's group when that general assumed the chief command. Ambitious and recklessly brave, he was thirsting for a chance of distinction, a thirst likely to be gratified; for Kemp himself, now in control of the freshest and best Boer force in the theatre of war, was not in the mood for caution. Over against him were 11,000 British troops, not of uniform quality, but a fine body of men, worthily representative of the new anti-guerilla army created and trained under Kitchener's *régime*. As it happened, no cavalry were present; otherwise every category of troops, whether viewed as sons of the Empire or as parts of the military organism, had their place in the ranks; and if any one were disposed to doubt the Protean adaptability of the British race for purposes of war, he would do well to study the field-states of Ian Hamilton's force. There were infantry on foot, but far more infantry in the saddle; there were gunners with guns, but far more with rifles, and there were hundreds of townsmen among the

Compared with the British.

* Commandos.—Potchefstroom, Wolmaransstad: Liebenberg. Lichtenburg, Bloemhof: Celliers. Rustenburg, West Pretoria, Krugersdorp: Potgieter.

Yeomanry who had barely been able to sit a horse or sight a rifle when they first came to South Africa. No mounted corps on the field had had a separate existence before the war broke out, and only one, the Imperial Light Horse, was as old even as the outbreak of war. Lastly, all the divisional commanders of this essentially mounted force, most of the column commanders, and the G.O.C. himself were infantrymen by origin. But, with all its great merits, the force was under the limitations inseparable from its composition. Greatly superior in strength to Kemp's force, it was inferior in tactical skill and marksmanship, and, in pursuance of a policy evolved under pressure of such deficiencies as these, it stood on a front of no less than twenty-seven miles, presenting, as such a formation always did, a tempting chance to a bold Boer leader of concentrating rapidly against a weak point.

Kemp's feint divined by Hamilton, April 10.

Kemp's open demonstration towards the extreme British left on the afternoon of the 10th was a little too ostentatious to have the desired effect. Ian Hamilton who, apart from news of this demonstration, had no precise knowledge of his opponent's position or intentions, had concluded that it was a feint, foretelling an attack on his right. His orders for the 11th, therefore, were that Kekewich, moving in close formation, should complete his extension to the Hart's River before advancing south, and that Rawlinson and Kitchener should edge in slightly to their right, covering as wide an extent of country as they conveniently could, but holding the bulk of their troops well in hand.

Map, p. 536.

Kemp's miscalculations.

The conclusion was sound. Kemp, whose main body was opposite the British right, withdrew his easterly detachment by a rapid march during the night, and on the morning of the 11th concentrated on the farm lands of Roodewal, some three miles distant from Kekewich's right flank. But chance had placed him at a disadvantage of which he was unaware. Kekewich's error in marching to Boschpan on the previous afternoon had had the undesigned effect of deceiving Kemp as to the British dispositions. Ignorant that Kekewich had partially rectified the mistake by moving late in the evening further to the west, he thought the British right

flank still rested on Boschpan, and that in attacking from Roodewal he would have a wide margin for manœuvre on the British flank and rear. Nor was this all; for he expected, no doubt, that the columns, according to precedent, would advance in the same long extended line which had been their formation during the night. But Kekewich, as we have seen, was ordered to march in close order.

Action of Roodewal, April 11. Kekewich starts, April 11, A.M.

It will be remembered that Kekewich commanded two columns under Grenfell and von Donop, of which Grenfell's lay on the left during the night of the 10th, von Donop's on the right. In accordance with his instructions to concentrate in the morning, Kekewich started off Grenfell very early, and at 7 A.M. the two columns were joined up on the borders of Roodewal. The preliminary advance westward towards the Hart's River was then begun, von Donop leading and Grenfell following. An advanced screen under Major Roy, consisting of 280 Mounted Infantry and a pom-pom, preceded the main force, whose line of march was close to the bed of the Brak Spruit.

Important news from the front, 7 A.M.

The advance had scarcely begun when von Donop received a message from the left flankers of the advance guard (thirty of the 11th M.I. under Lieutenant Chaloner) that a large force of mounted men had been observed to the south, marching parallel. It is a proof of the difficulty of maintaining concert in a force disposed over so wide a front, that von Donop at first thought this force must belong to Rawlinson, and consequently gave no orders. He proceeded, however, with a small escort to ride out to the front himself, leaving his column still in close order. Before he had gone far, a tactical situation of extraordinary interest suddenly developed. A second report from Chaloner to the effect that the force already viewed had closed in slightly and was firing at long range, caused Roy to send up his centre support (sixty of the 21st M.I. and a pom-pom) to reinforce the left flankers. Galloping up a gentle incline they met Chaloner's party retiring, pursued, as it seemed, by an army. The whole sky-line was thickly dotted with figures on horseback, riding slowly forward and forming line as they came. To the view of the Mounted Infantry the line was roughly convex; for the

The Boer line appears.

centre was well in advance, while the wings, stretching to the north and south, and on the left far outflanking the British advanced screen, were still somewhat in rear. This convexity, however, was in process of being corrected; and that in the most methodical fashion. The centre rode quietly forward at the "trippling" pace of Boer ponies; the wings, pressing on to pick up their dressing, moved at a leisurely canter. At 600 yards from the British left flankers, now reinforced by the centre support, there was a momentary halt, as if for mutual inspection, a momentary lull in the low drum of hoofs. "It must be Rawlinson," was the thought in the minds of the troopers; but they were soon undeceived. The line leapt into motion; rifles crackled as the riders fired from the saddle; it was a Boer charge; a charge, moreover, on an unprecedented scale. A number of Boers, variously estimated from 1,000 to 1,500, were bearing down in two irregular ranks, the centre, led by Potgieter, still somewhat in advance, the wings rapidly coming into line. Recovering from their astonishment, the M.I. and pom-pom poured a hot but rather flurried fire into the advancing line, and then began an orderly retirement on the main body. Roy's advanced screen, however, consisting of forty of the 10th M.I., owing to the angle at which the charge came, were caught up and much mauled before they could escape. Some of the flankers and supports were also overtaken. The pom-pom had just time to gallop to the rear.

Advance guard driven back.

The Boer charge proceeds.

Kemp might well imagine that all was going to perfection. But he had not, so it seems, counted on the massed columns, over 3,000 strong, in support, and hence, by a carelessness which De la Rey never would have shown, he had not taken into account the nature of the ground. The moment his line had topped the gentle rise on the south-west corner of Roodewal, it had come into full view, not only of the advance guard, but of the two main columns, a mile and a half distant. The ground, with a barely perceptible slope downward to the Brak Spruit, was for all intents and purposes a level plain, without cover for a mouse. Since the charge of the fanatical dervishes at Omdurman no more reckless attack had been witnessed. Yet, defying all the rules of war, from this very

defiance it gained a certain security. The columns were not deployed. "It must be Rawlinson," was again the first thought of officers and men. Grenfell's column, towards which the Boer centre was heading, halted for a few moments in perplexity. Then from the plain in front a single horseman, galloping furiously up to Grenfell, shouted, "They are Boers; all those men are Boers."

Grenfell deploys.

The truth grasped, Kekewich and Grenfell acted with fine promptitude. There was just time for a rough deployment. All units were wheeled sharply to the left and advanced a short distance; two field guns and two pom-poms came into action on the right, with 300 S.A.C. extended on either side of them; in the centre the Scottish Horse, 500 strong, dismounted and lined some mealie fields; and 420 Yeomanry prolonged the line on the left. Von Donop's column, left for the moment without its leader (for von Donop was up at the front), was slower in deploying. The remains of his advance guard already prolonged Grenfell's right; his guns came into action, and Major Pitman of the 5th I.Y. seized a bushy hill to the right front where the extreme northern Boer wing was threatening a flank attack; but the main body was scarcely engaged.

Climax of the charge.

By the time Grenfell's men were in position, the range had decreased to 600 yards, and the sight was one which those present will never forget. About 800 Boers, shouting and firing from the saddle, rode knee to knee, no longer in two ranks, but in a solid line of irregular depth—two-deep, three-deep and four-deep—Potgieter, conspicuous in a blue shirt, still in advance of the centre. The pace, even now, was not at all remarkable, a brisk canter at the best. At this serried line, a target seemingly impossible to miss, 1,500 magazine rifles and six guns for a few minutes flung a torrent of bullets and shells. By the accepted rules of war the line should have been annihilated; yet it swept nearer and nearer. Rents were torn in it; ponies fell headlong; but it was not till the distance dividing the two forces was reduced to 300 yards that the Boers really faltered. Then the storm of lead— high and wild as much of it was—told its tale. Even now a desperate minority, still led by Potgieter, pressed on with

The repulse.

obstinate valour. Many got within 100 yards; Potgieter fell, shot through the head, only 70 yards from the British bayonets.

No counter-stroke possible.

Never was there such an opportunity for a crushing counter-stroke. But the troops were not equal to the task of reaping the full fruits of victory. Indeed, if we consider all the circumstances, we shall be content to acclaim the steadiness with which they deployed and the firmness with which they faced this deluge of veteran horsemen. The Boers, leaving 50 dead and 30 badly wounded men behind them, retired slowly and sullenly to safe range. Kekewich, up to this point, had lost seven killed and 56 wounded. Considering that the Boers fired from horseback and the British from mother earth, the relative figures are instructive in more ways than one.

Rawlinson comes up.

Though the Boers still presented a threatening aspect, there now came a diversion. Rawlinson, from his position seven miles to the east, had heard the outburst of firing and, without waiting for Hamilton's orders, had taken instant action. While Scott and Dawkins were warned to incline to the right, Briggs, with the I.L.H., who already stood on Rawlinson's right, galloped straight to the scene of action and, arriving at 8 A.M., forced the Boers to retire. Falling back in an orderly fashion, they took post on the hills above Broderick's Vlei and Simon's Vlei, five miles to the south. The same wing, however, which originally had threatened Pitman, and which had not yet been engaged, worked round to the north-west, and from the cover of bush demonstrated against von Donop's right and rear.

Hamilton orders a general pursuit.

Ignoring this diversion, Ian Hamilton, who had arrived on the scene at the crisis of the attack, now gave orders for a general pursuit. Kekewich and Rawlinson were to sweep in line to the south, the former skirting the Hart's River. W. Kitchener, to whom Hamilton telegraphed by field cable, was to swing round to the west and endeavour to cut in at Vleeschkraal upon the Boer line of retreat. But another hour and a half passed before the troops were under way. By the time convoys had been parked, escorts organised and the scattered troops reformed, it was 9·30. Even then Kemp

was taken by surprise; for he had not anticipated pursuit, and when Kekewich and Rawlinson came into view, sweeping to the south on a front of five miles, he found that his men had lost much of their start and must gallop for dear life. But for this miscalculation, it is doubtful if touch would ever have been regained. As it was, Kemp still had sufficient start to save his men, if not his artillery. He split his force into two bodies, one of which fled south-west towards Schweizer Reneke, the other due south to Vleeschkraal. The artillery accompanied the former body, and at 2.30 P.M., after a breathless chase of eighteen miles, two field guns and a pom-pom, the last of the British artillery captured at Tweebosch, together with a small escort of 30 burghers, fell into the hands of Kekewich, who thoroughly deserved his good fortune. Here, at the farm Nooitgedacht, his pursuit came to an end through sheer exhaustion.

The Boer guns taken.

The flank movement allotted to W. Kitchener and designed to cut the line of retreat, came to nothing; not through any particular fault of Kitchener's, but through the difficulty of manœuvring troops over a frontage of twenty-five miles. The field cable by which Hamilton's message was sent extended only a part of the way to Kitchener's headquarters. Cookson, reading it *en route*, did not like to act without his chief's orders. It was 11 A.M., almost too late for effective intervention, when Kitchener started. He did his best; but the country was bushy and little known, and a vast swarm of locusts, looking in the distance like the dust raised by troops, caused an abortive diversion, so that he camped in the evening without seeing anything of the exhausted Boers who had passed Vleeschkraal with Rawlinson in pursuit. On the 12th and 13th the columns returned to their starting-points, Middelbult and Driekuil.

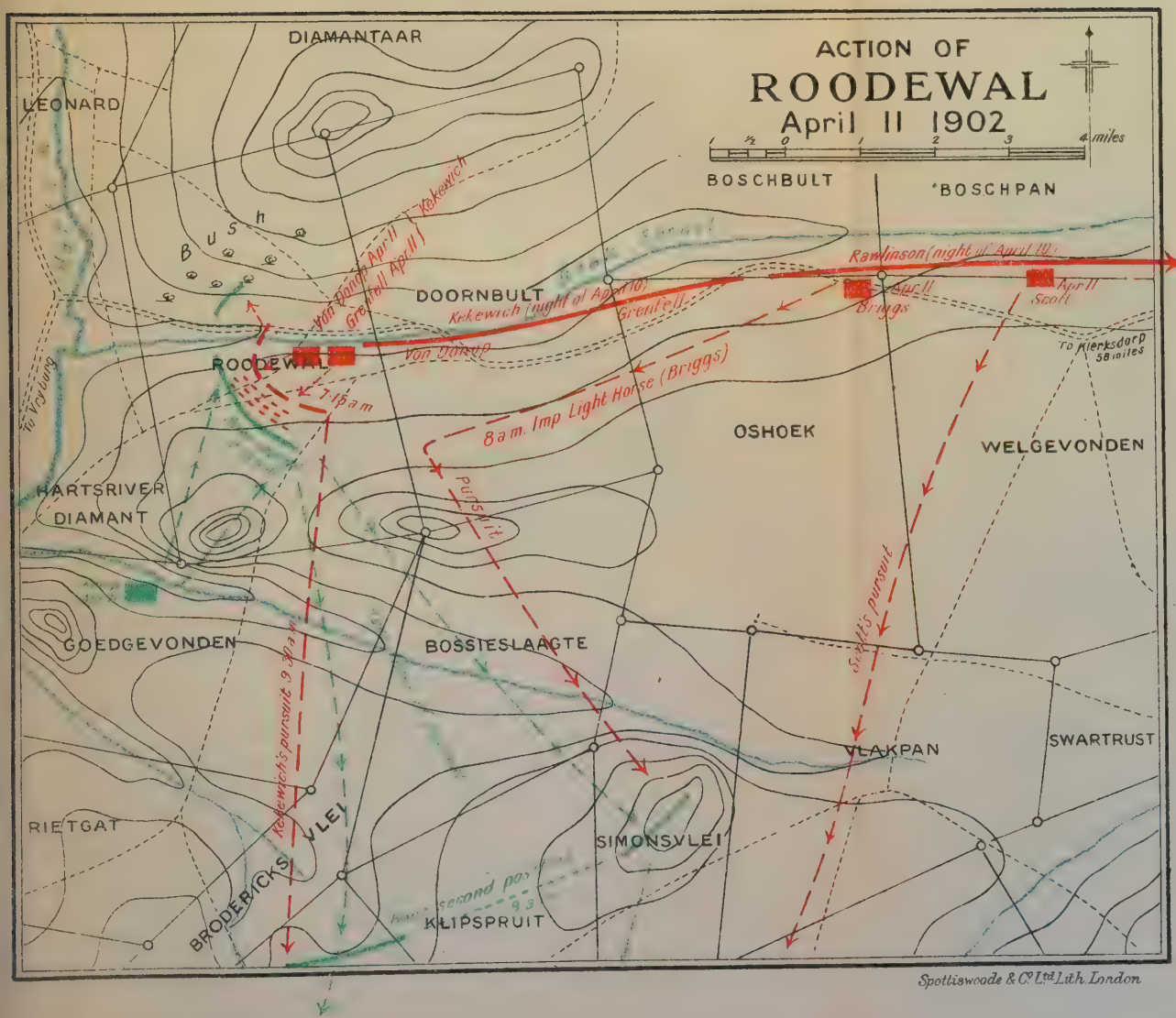
W. Kitchener's flank movement fails.

To students of war Roodewal should be of the deepest interest. To dismiss the action as one more proof of the old dogma that unbroken stationary troops have nothing to fear from a mounted charge would be to make a profound mistake. The old dogma remains unshaken to this extent, that under fair defensive conditions, with an open and extensive field of fire, with good discipline and moral, the

The tactical lesson of Roodewal.

stationary force, even if its marksmanship is poor, has little to fear. To say more would be to miss one of the clearest tactical lessons of the war; to ignore the teaching of Vlakfontein, Bakenlaagte, Blood River Poort, Kleinfontein, Yzer Spruit, Tweebosch and many lesser combats. Although Kemp's tactics at Roodewal were of the same character, on this occasion he violated the rules governing those tactics. Success hinged, and in such strokes will always hinge, on a large measure of surprise and a skilful choice of ground. At Roodewal, so long as it was a question merely of riding down the advance guard, these conditions existed in perfection; but in projecting his charge against the massed columns, Kemp—or Potgieter—threw prudence to the winds. The Boers, not, as heretofore, in more or less open order, but in close order and riding slowly, crossed a mile and a half of open ground in broad sunlight. There was no mist as at Bakenlaagte, no veld-fire smoke as at Vlakfontein, no bush to spring from nor twilight to shroud the spring as at Yzer Spruit, no stunning surprise as at Blood River Poort, no demoralised enemy as at Tweebosch. Even so, it is important to note how close the Boers got, how slight in proportion to the risk were the losses they incurred and how orderly was their retreat. The reasons are not far to seek. Apart from the naturally poor shooting of the defence, aim was confused by the inrush of the British screen, by the hurry of improvised deployment, by the mere audacity of the charge, by the idea, born of this audacity and not wholly eradicated until the charge had nearly spent itself, that the approaching line of horsemen was British, not Boer; and lastly, by magazine fire from the saddle, unaimed but daunting, and to an appreciable extent, damaging. All these factors, and especially perhaps the last, besides securing a high degree of immunity for the attack, choked down a counterstroke.* None, save the last, can be described as abnormal factors in a mounted combat. On the contrary, they represent circumstances upon which a dashing

* 150 horses were killed in Grenfell's column; *i.e.*, exclusive of those belonging to the advanced screen. Many more were temporarily stampeded.



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leader of horse, timing his stroke well, has a fair right to count.

Tactical mobility as opposed to "shock."

In estimating the value and opportunities of the charge of mounted riflemen, thought should not be confused by retaining the old word "shock-tactics," inseparably associated with the physical impact of horse and man and the cut and thrust of cold steel. Physical shock was no object of the Boer charge; as for the *arme blanche*, they would not have taken sabres at a gift. The charge was simply the supreme expression of tactical mobility. Its object was to carry riflemen swiftly and suddenly to decisive range, overawing the defence while the passage lasted by fire delivered from the saddle. As such it should be studied, and, in our humble opinion, imitated.

Material and moral results of the action.

At Roodewal, one of the last important actions of the war, 110 Boers were killed, wounded or captured and three guns were taken. Comparatively small as these fruits were—for the loss of guns was never of any real importance to the enemy—the repulse and the sustained and vigorous pursuit had a marked effect on the Boers of the Western Transvaal. Transmitted to Pretoria, where the question of peace was under discussion, the news caused depression among the Boer delegates and undoubtedly influenced their counsels.

CHAPTER XX

THE GENERAL SITUATION IN APRIL, 1902

BEFORE describing the negotiations which were opened at Pretoria on April 12 between Kitchener and the Boer delegates, it is necessary to gather up the manifold threads of the great web of war and to review the military situation as it existed at that date.

I

The Campaign in Cape Colony from November 1901 *onward*

Conditions in the Colony, Nov. 1901.

We have not touched upon the campaign in Cape Colony since the close of Chapter XIII, when the narrative was carried to the end of October 1901. Affairs in the Colony since that date, though they had assumed a somewhat serious complexion early in February 1902, had, on the whole, undergone little change. Yet it would be a great mistake to underrate the significance of the petty and sporadic warfare which flickered up and down the vast territories south of the Orange. In the teeth of every discouragement, the Boer leaders, and especially Steyn and de Wet, persistently clung to the policy of sustaining and feeding the rebellion. Driblets of men and, occasionally, substantial bands, periodically crossed the Orange, principally to serve as officers over the rebels. To an appeal presented in October, 1901, by a deputation of Afrikander clergymen, who begged him to withdraw the commandos and let the land have peace, Steyn returned the cold answer that the remedy of the colonists was to rise *en masse*, when the land would soon have peace. That dream of a general rising was as far as ever from realisation; but the general attitude of the Dutch farmers remained, as before,

one of sullen hostility to the British, and of secret, and sometimes active, sympathy with the rebels. Under these circumstances there could be no question for the British of relaxing their efforts in the Colony. At the same time Kitchener continued to view the danger in this quarter with a just and steady eye. Rightly gauging the temper of the Dutch, he resolved, while giving French all the reinforcements he could spare, never to be diverted from the grand aim of crushing the forces of the Republics on their own soil. Even so, the demands made on his mounted army by the exigencies of the Colony were serious enough. At the end of October, 1901, apart altogether from more than 20,000 colonists raised for local defence, French had sixteen mobile columns, representing 46 guns and 8,000 men. In April, 1902, though artillery had been reduced and the local levies had been entirely eliminated from the mobile columns, the total number of mobile troops had risen to nearly 9,000. In other words, the force tied to Cape Colony would have sufficed to prosecute an active campaign against De la Rey during those months of enforced neglect which he turned to such signal profit.

Martial law.

Major-General Settle, who had been absent in England for six months, returned to South Africa at the end of October, 1901, and, after an inquiry into the administration of martial law and a short term of command at De Aar, succeeded, on December 11, to the administrative command of the Colony in succession to Major-General A. S. Wynne. At the same period, the system of martial law, the subject of so many and bitter complaints, was revised for the last time. While the central Board of Control, established on October 9, was retained, area and district commandants were abolished on December 1 and their places taken by officers to whom the name of Area Administrators was given, and who, in their turn, were assisted by civil resident magistrates. The administration of martial law must always produce discontent and a certain amount of injustice, and to the very end the system here was no exception. On the whole, however, it worked as well and as fairly as could be expected.

It will be remembered that at the end of October one of

The lull, end of October 1901.

the periodical lulls had just set in. Lotter's commando had been destroyed, Scheepers had been captured, Kritzinger was still in the Free State, and Smuts had been driven out of the midlands. Though Myburg, Fouché and Wessels still clung to the north-east, the bulk of the rebel bands had settled down in the west; that is to say, in the regions west and north of the Cape Town-De Aar Railway. Myburg and his companions continued, till the end of the war, to conduct an independent campaign of their own in the north-east, hunted incessantly, but with slight success, by British columns. The midlands, too, suffered, as we shall see, from new incursions; but for the last months of the war it was the west which was the main theatre of interest. It was here that the bands received most of their recruits; it was here that they found the most abundant sources of supply; and it was here that they seized their few opportunities for inflicting blows on British columns. The expulsion of Hertzog and de Wet from this region in February, 1901, had produced only a transient tranquillity. In march of that year a young corporal, Salomon Maritz by name, was sent to organise rebellion in the Kenhart district. Maritz, by his energy and bravery, rose rapidly to the rank of commandant. All through the winter and spring of 1901, he was the scarcely disputed master of the Kenhart and Calvinia districts; and when Smuts, in October, reached the Calvinia district and made him a general, he had under him from 500 to 600 well-equipped rebels. Jan Louw and Conroy were his principal lieutenants.

The western theatre.

Smuts and Kritzinger.

During the whole period which we are about to review, Smuts, the young Transvaal lawyer, was in nominal command of all the commandos in the Colony, but his control over some of the mushroom bands, which were constantly starting into life, was practically very small. Sometimes leading in the field, he devoted his main energies to the uphill task of organisation and recruiting. His utmost efforts, however, produced only small, though regular, accessions to the rebel ranks. Kritzinger, if he could ever succeed in getting back to the Colony, was destined, as before, to organise the rebellion in the midlands.

Altogether there were under arms in Cape Colony at the beginning of November 1901 about 1,500 men, one-seventh Boers and the rest rebels. To crush this tiny but mercurial army was a problem of exasperating difficulty. In some ways, indeed, the problem had never been so baffling. Whereas in the midlands there was, at least, a network of railways, the west, while as mountainous as the midlands, was devoid of railways, poor in roads and of greater extent than any other area in the field of war. From Cape Town northward to Port Nolloth, the port of Namaqualand, is 330 miles as the crow flies; from Port Nolloth eastward to Hopetown is 425 miles; and from Hopetown to Cape Town is 440 miles. In the south-west corner of this vast triangle there are some rich tracts of country in the districts of Ceres, Tulbagh, Piquetberg and Malmesbury; but, generally speaking, from the railway northward the country grows wilder, more barren and more sparsely populated, until, far up in the north-west corner, the copper mines of Namaqualand form an industrial oasis of considerable importance. At the beginning of November, Smuts, with the Transvaaler Van der Venter as his second in command, together with Maritz, Pyper (who had succeeded Scheepers), Conroy, Lategan, Jan Louw and other leaders, were all north of the railway, established in the very disloyal districts of Clanwilliam, Calvinia, Sutherland, Fraserburg and Beaufort West. Lategan, under whom, by Smut's orders, Conroy and Louw were now placed, was further north, in the Kenhart district.

Difficult conditions in the west.

Of the sixteen small columns into which French had divided his field force,* seven, under Colonels Callwell, Wyndham, Crabbe, Capper and Kavanagh, and Majors Lund and Wormald, were working in the west, and one, under Colonel W. L. White, in the remote north-west; Colonels Monro and Scobell were tackling Myburg, Fouché and Wessels in the north-east; and Colonels Hunter-Weston, B. Doran and Lord William Bentinck watched the line of the Orange with the object of checking fresh invasions. The

French's field force.

* French's Force in November 1901.—428 officers, 7,560 men, 46 guns.

strength of these columns varied from 200 to 700, and averaged about 400. The practice of minute subdivision of the field force, rendered necessary, no doubt, by the smallness of the rebel bands, had marked disadvantages. The waste of force and the waste of transport were very great. Each column was a tiny army in itself, complete with staff, intelligence, signallers, police, hospital, transport and so on; each, viewed as a fighting force, was very weak. Instead of enterprise and mobility, lack of confidence and a paradoxical unwieldiness were often the results. Nor were these small units homogeneous. On the contrary, the habit became increasingly common of throwing together chance fragments of regiments and making little patchwork columns, lacking harmony and *esprit de corps*. When we add that French suffered from a chronic lack of transport and that some of the improvised Colonial troops were of exceedingly poor quality, it will be understood that the task of bringing to book the Boer bands, skilful, well-informed and light as air, was one that can scarcely be exaggerated.

The problem of supply.

French had given the general control of the operations in the west to Major-General Stephenson, with Colonel Haig to assist him as a group-commander. Supply was the great difficulty. While the fact was recognised that if the limitless region north of the Cape Town-De Aar Railway was to be penetrated with freedom, advanced depôts were necessary, no comprehensive preparations were made for the campaign. The driblets of stores pushed up to Sutherland, Fraserburg, Clanwilliam, and even to Calvinia, were never enough to keep pace with the requirements of the columns, whose movements, in consequence, were jerky and ineffectual. Early in December the difficulty was still further aggravated by the commencement of the blockhouse line, referred to in Chapter XIV, from Lambert's Bay to Victoria Road. We may briefly remind the reader that the great length of this line, the remoteness of the country it traversed and the fact that it only touched a railway at one end, rendered it of little value, while its construction, necessitating several covering columns and a large part of the already inadequate transport, caused much embarrassment to the active opera-

See p. 401.

tions which it was meant eventually to assist.* Not completely finished until May 1902, it was never efficacious either as a barrier or as a line of supply. Many blockhouses were manned by coloured troops of little fighting value.†

The campaign in November 1901.

We have now prepared the ground for a chronological narrative. The first symptoms of trouble in the west showed themselves early in November, when Colonel Callwell, operating north of Sutherland, was hotly attacked at Brandkraal by Van der Venter, and extricated himself with difficulty. On the other hand, Maritz received a severe wound in an attack on the small post of Tontelboschkolk in the Calvinia district, where the rebels seized a quantity of horses, but could not subdue the half-breed garrison, which held out stoutly for ten days. The most important event in November, however, was the invasion of the Colony, at de Wet's instigation, by a band of a hundred Free Staters under Commandant Naude. Evading the river blockhouses, they crossed the Orange at Sand Drift on November 22, threw off Hunter-Weston, who was sent upon their track, and on the night of November 29, owing to negligence on the De Aar-Orange River blockhouse line, crossed that railway without a shot and joined Smuts in the west.

Fresh incursion by Kritzinger, Dec. 16.

A fortnight later, Kritzinger, who had been in the Free State since August and had not been heard of prominently since he cut up Lovat's Scouts in September, attempted to regain his old hunting grounds in the Colony. Following Naude's example, he and a hundred Free Staters crossed the Orange on December 15 at Sand Drift. French was better prepared this time and a hot pursuit at once began. It must be acknowledged that Kritzinger never shone better than in this his last and most desperate ride; nor can any praise be too high for the keenness and tenacity of the pursuit. At 6 A.M on the 16th, B. Doran, with the 5th Lancers, surprised Kritzinger breakfasting at

* Kitchener made many efforts to induce the Cape Colony Government to construct a railway on the track of this blockhouse line. The Government, very naturally, objected on the ground of cost.

† On one occasion some Intelligence emissaries, masquerading as Boers, tested the works of defence. They captured several blockhouses within which the coloured soldiers were playing cards.

Beschuitfontein, twenty miles from Sand Drift, and chased him west toward Hanover Road; Bentinck, with the 10th Hussars, joined in the hue and cry, and all day over the hot plains, "as blown dust-devils go," pursuers and pursued galloped, and, as they galloped, fought. Kritzinger's men had two or three horses apiece, so that, although scores of exhausted mounts were shed, the rest carried the invaders forward without a pause. Over the Naauwpoort-Norval's Pont railway, southward towards Hanover Road, then westward nearly to De Aar, lastly, by a sharp double, eastward again to Hanover Road—such was the course of the hunt. At 6 P.M. Kritzinger found himself confronted by the blockhoused railway near Franschman's Kop, five miles from Hanover Road Station. Bentinck and Doran were behind in a semi-enveloping arc; it was full daylight still, and the blockhouses were on the alert; but "needs must when the devil drives," and the Boers cut the wires under a heavy fire and slowly forced a crossing. Kritzinger and eight men were left behind. He had been foremost in the attack, exposing himself recklessly and three times returning to rescue wounded men. On the last occasion he was wounded and taken prisoner. His men, under Louis Wessels, rode on. When they slept that night, near Hanover, they had covered eighty miles, fighting all day in the blazing heat and dropping 110 horses and 18 men. At dawn on the 17th they were shelled and harried once more by Bentinck, and Wormald was summoned to intercept them at Richmond. Throwing off both columns they raced south to Murraysburg, thence to Cradock and thence to Somerset. For six weeks longer, hunted by B. Doran, Follett and Vaughan, they wriggled to and fro in the midlands, and in mid-February, reduced to fifty men, were driven into the north-west.*

Capture of Kritzinger, Dec. 16.

The west in December 1901.

Kritzinger's capture was the only event of first-rate importance in the month of December. Scobell† and

* Their principal exploit was on Jan. 27, when they derailed and burnt a loaded train between Middelburg and Cradock, and on the next day raided the Cradock horse farm.

† Scobell's Column:—9th Lancers, 300; 2nd Tasmanian I.B., 230; 17th Lancers, 150; 9th Co. I.Y., 113; Cape M.R., 65; two guns 5th Batt. R.F.A.; three guns C.M.R. Art.

Monro,* however, engaging Fouché several times in the north-east, had taken nearly 50 of his men and 350 horses. At the end of the month Scobell, one of the ablest cavalry leaders whom the war in the Colony had produced, gave up his command after long and continuous service, and was succeeded by Major Follett. In the west operations were languishing. The district bordering the Atlantic coast, from Cape Town to Lambert's Bay, was temporarily cleared by Stephenson's columns; but Crabbe and Wyndham, while pushing a convoy through from Clanwilliam to Calvinia, were attacked with unusual determination on December 22 and 23. Mainly through the fine behaviour of the 16th Lancers, the attack was repulsed. Latterly, by arrangement with the Cape Government, it had been found necessary to begin the elimination from the mobile columns of all local levies, and by the end of the year the process was nearly complete. Some were disbanded altogether, while the rest were gradually assigned to local defence, under the control of the civil power.

The campaign in January 1902.

In January, the whole interest centres in the west. Smuts and Van der Venter, with the bands of Malan, Bouwers, Theron, Pyper, Louw, Smit, Van Reenen and Schoeman, were established in the Van Rhynsdorp and Calvinia districts. Smuts had not wasted his time of late. Stores of grain had been collected in the Zak River Basin, remount stations had been organised, and many recruits from the disloyal districts of Kenhart and Prieska had gathered to his standard. Nor had Stephenson been idle. With a view to future operations he had pushed up supplies to Clanwilliam, Sutherland, Carnarvon and Fraserburg; but the quantities collected were not sufficient and the combined operations, when they came, were premature. While Colonel Haig, with the columns of Wyndham and Kavanagh, acted as a "stop" on the line Lambert's Bay-Doorn River, Capper, Callwell, Wormald and W. Doran made a general advance towards that line. On January 16, the scheme was dislocated by a general movement of the enemy eastward,

* Monro's Column:—Bethune's M.I., 350; 17th Lancers, 180; 15th Bn. I.Y., 250; two guns 39th Batt.

as though for a dash on the midlands. Although this move was checkmated by the rapid transfer of Callwell to Prince Albert Road Station, of Crabbe to Beaufort West, and of B. Doran to Victoria Road, the operations as a whole failed, and at the end of the month the storm-centre had shifted to the Fraserburg district. Van der Venter and Theron, however, with 500 men between them, had doubled back to the district north of Sutherland.

The campaign in February 1902.

Crabbe and the donkey convoy, Jan. 30–Feb. 5.

February opened badly. The town of Fraserburg was supplied by convoys from the railway at Beaufort West, and one of these convoys, consisting of 100 wagons drawn by donkeys, accompanied by a weak escort of 100 4th West Yorks (Militia) and 50 District Mounted Troops, left Beaufort West on January 30, in charge of Major Crofton of the 3rd East Surrey Regiment. The distance to Fraserburg was eighty miles, across very difficult country. Since it was known that the enemy were in the district and on the look-out for plunder, Stephenson ordered Crabbe's column to move in advance of the convoy and clear the road to Fraserburg. Crabbe's fighting strength of 500, distributed over seven fighting units, of which the two largest were 122 men of the 16th Lancers and 114 men of the Guards M.I., was not sufficient for the purpose.* Under the circumstances his best course would have been to march in close company with the convoy; but the donkeys moved at a very indifferent speed and Crabbe soon out-distanced them. On February 3 the convoy halted at Uitspanfontein, where Crofton, finding himself opposed, formed an intrenched camp and remained in it during the 4th. Crabbe, meanwhile, had got into serious difficulties further ahead.

Crabbe in difficulties, Feb. 1–3.

Attacked as early as February 1 by Van Reenen and Smit, he had beaten them off with little difficulty. Camping that night at Rietfontein, and advancing on the 2nd toward Fraserburg, he found himself in a hornet's nest. Malan, Hugo, Pyper, Smit and Lategan, united under the command of Malan, swarmed up, till nearly 800 Boers were buzzing

* Crabbe's Column:—16th Lancers, 122; Guards M.I., 114; 99th Co. I.Y., 76; 104th Co. I.Y., 56; S.A.M.I.F., 39; C.M.S.C., 10; Royal Fusiliers, 78; two guns 88th Battery.

round the column. Crabbe found it impossible to advance and, after some hard fighting, in which the 104th I.Y. particularly distinguished themselves, camped at the farm Waterval, having lost 21 men. The farm was sangared for defence, but it was a bad position. Soon after midnight, therefore, Crabbe stole adroitly through the Boer lines and gained Rietfontein at 6 A.M. on the 3rd, only to find himself once more surrounded, apparently by greatly superior numbers. Rietfontein is ten miles distant from Uitspanfontein, where, on the same day, Crofton and the convoy were lying intrenched. Crabbe had only two days' rations left; messengers sent for help to Fraserburg were unable to pierce the Boer screen; the prospect appeared black.

Crabbe relieved, Feb. 4.

Malan, however, made a mistake. Having captured the British doctor on the previous day, he had sent him through with the British wounded to Fraserburg. Crabbe's danger being thus made known, Capper * and Lund,† who were at Sutherland, marched rapidly to his assistance and on the evening of the 4th relieved all pressure. The sequel was strange. Everybody seems to have assumed that, with the exception of Smit, who was known to have gone east towards Crofton's convoy, all the rebel bands had retreated north to Carnarvon. As for Crofton, messages from him had reached Crabbe on the 3rd and 4th to the effect that the convoy was safe. It was only, therefore, with the idea of making its further progress absolutely sure that Crabbe, on the morning of the 5th, unsupported by Capper or Lund, marched back toward Uitspanfontein. He arrived to find the force captured, Crofton killed and the Boers burning the convoy.

Capture of the donkey convoy.

The truth seems to have been that on the 3rd and 4th Crabbe had been pinned down by a demonstration. Leaving a screen to impose upon him, Malan, with Hugo, Van Reenen and Pyper had hurried back to join Smit in attacking the donkey convoy, which Crofton had laagered between two sangared kopjes. The sangars were inadequate and the

* Capper's Column:—12th Lancers, 292; 111th Co. I.Y., 65; two guns 88th Batt.

† Lund's Column:—9th Lancers, 132; 17th Lancers, 140; 110th Co. I.Y., 144; one pom-pom.

position too extensive. Twenty-five district troops, who had been sent out in the morning to reconnoitre, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, so that Crofton had only 125 men to man his works. A tentative attack was opened by Smit at 2 P.M. on the 4th, and at midnight, when Malan's bands had arrived, the real assault began. Stoutly as the sangars were defended, they were stormed and captured in detail; the main sangar, held by 18 men under Crofton and Captain Logan Ellis, being the last to fall. Crofton, who in spite of a painful wound had continued to direct the defence with unflinching resolution, was killed. Eleven of the rank and file were killed, two officers and 39 men were wounded and the rest were prisoners.

Crabbe in fresh difficulties.

When Crabbe approached the scene of the disaster, still thinking he had to deal only with Smit, he found himself once more in the hornet's nest, furiously attacked by the whole Boer force, fresh from their triumph over Crofton. The column beat a retreat; once more Capper and Lund were sent for, and arrived just in time to avert a second disaster. Crabbe had lost 31 men. Special praise is due to Lieutenant R. H. Ayton and the gunners of the 88th Battery who, with scarcely any support, had covered the retreat in gallant style.

Other events in February.

The whole of this unfortunate expedition was badly conducted; but the truth is that, under the existing circumstances, it was a blunder on Stephenson's part to have sent it out at all. Nor was this his only mistake in the first week of February. The sudden withdrawal of Capper and Lund from Sutherland, following the dislocation already caused by the transfer of Callwell and Crabbe to the railway, left W. Doran with a miserably weak and heterogeneous column of 350 men * and two guns absolutely isolated in the country north of Sutherland, where Van der Venter was prowling with a veteran band of 500. On February 5, leaving a detachment to guard his convoy, Doran made a pounce on a small rebel laager under Geldenhuis. In his absence Van der Venter attacked the convoy, inflicted 27 casualties, and

* W. Doran's Column:—11th I.Y., 107; C.M.R., 45; 23rd I.Y., 111; 24th I.Y., 75; two field guns, 38.

captured or destroyed all the wagons. Though Doran, hurrying back, managed to save the mules, this second loss of wagons was a serious one for French, who was always starved in transport. Van der Venter now roamed away to the north-west and on February 25 snapped up a post of 80 Cape Police at Windhoek, twelve miles south of Van Rhynsdorp. Here he threatened Haig (controlling Wyndham and Kavanagh) who, without outrunning his supplies, had pushed steadily up from Lambert's Bay to Calvinia, and on the 13th had administered a sharp surprise to Bouwers, taking 11 prisoners and 60 horses. In order to help him to withstand Van der Venter, he was now reinforced by Callwell.

French's drive, Feb. 17–22.

Meanwhile, in order to break up the concentration round Fraserburg and to force all Malan's bands northward beyond the still unfinished blockhouse line, French had directed Stephenson to sweep north with B. Doran, Capper, Crabbe, Bentinck, Lund and Wormald from the line Nelspoort Station - Beaufort West - Rhenosterfontein. The advance began on February 17, and on the 18th Hugo was mortally wounded in a brush with B. Doran. If the strategical object of the movement was eventually achieved, the result was only to multiply centres of disturbance in yet more inconvenient regions. Smit and Pyper pierced the blockhouse line and went towards Prieska. Of the other bands, some joined Van der Venter in the north-west; others settled down just out of reach in the north; lastly Malan, with 200 men, doubled round the British right, crossed the railway in the small hours of the 21st, and flung himself into the peaceful midlands. This was a most vexatious occurrence; for a week later Fouché, Myburg, Oudendaal and Bezuidenhout darted down from their lairs in the north-east, and, forcing the railway blockhouses near Molteno, also invaded the midlands. At the end of February, indeed, the situation in Cape Colony was worse than it had been since the middle of September 1901, when Smuts made his first invasion.

A fresh rebel incursion into the midlands, Feb. 21.

Hostilities in the midlands, Feb.–May.

The double incursion into the midlands gave endless trouble. Although Bezuidenhout and Oudendaal were

ultimately driven back into the Jamestown district by Colonel Baillie,* Fouché and Malan effected a junction on March 18 in the Aberdeen district, and, in spite of the unremitting exertions of B. Doran, assisted later by W. Doran, Follett and Baillie, these bands maintained themselves in the midlands, as did the other two in the north-east, until the end of the war. Fouché, however, was roughly handled by Lovat's Scouts on May 21, and Malan was found badly wounded shortly before the declaration of peace.

French prepares systematically for the campaign in the west, Feb.

But from March onwards, it is in the west that the main interest centres. Early in the month French made a definite distribution of commands in that region. The whole country between the Orange, the blockhouse line, the Atlantic and the main railway was divided into two areas under Stephenson and Haig respectively. Haig, with Kavanagh and Wyndham, took the western sphere; Stephenson, with Capper, W. Doran, Bentinck, Wormald, Bethune,† Hoare‡ and Younghusband,§ the eastern. The line of division was the Zak River.

Smuts invades Namaqualand, end of Feb,

Under constant pressure from the south, Smuts now decided to transfer the activities of the rebels to Namaqualand, in the far north-west, where, without a vast improvement of lines of communication or a complete change of base to the Atlantic, it was extremely difficult for the British to follow him. The port of Namaqualand is Port Nolloth, and a light railway from it leads by a sinuous track of seventy-five miles to Ookiep, the principal centre of the Cape Copper Mining Company. Subsidiary centres at this time were Concordia, Nababeep and Springbok. For administrative purposes the Commandant of Namaqualand was Lieut.-Colonel Shelton of the 3rd West Surrey Regiment, and the only mobile force

* Baillie's (new) Column:—17th Lancers, 173; I.Y., 272; two guns 39th Batt.; one pom-pom.

† Bethune succeeded Crabbe, who, after a year of hard and good work, now returned home.

‡ Hoare succeeded Lund when the 9th Lancers were sent to India. Column:—17th Lancers, 150; 110th Co. I.Y., 134; one pom-pom.

§ Younghusband's (new) Column:—Younghusband's Horse, 250; Guards M.I., 144; one gun.

allotted to the huge districts of Namaqualand and Bushmanland was a small independent column mainly composed of half-breeds, under Colonel W. L. White R.A. By dint of great energy and pluck, White succeeded in keeping good order over 17,000 square miles of territory, until in the middle of March the rebel flood lapped up to his borders. He had marched to Garies, in order to gather up the eighty Cape Police who had been captured by Van der Venter. In returning to Ookiep, he was strongly opposed, driven back to Garies and pinned there. Having isolated White, Smuts and Maritz proceeded to attack the mining centres with 1,200 men, the largest force gathered in the Colony since de Wet's invasion of a year before. Shelton's main stronghold was at Ookiep, with weak outlying positions, which he should have evacuated in good time, at Concordia, Nababeep and Springbok. It was not till April 1, when Maritz assaulted and took Springbok, that Shelton hastily ordered in the other garrisons. That of Nababeep reached Ookiep safely; but on April 4 Concordia surrendered to Smuts without a shot under very disgraceful circumstances. Smuts, who thus came into possession of a quantity of dynamite and small-arms ammunition, invested Ookiep on the 4th, after a summons to surrender which Shelton curtly rejected. It was a strange climax to the guerilla war in the Colony.

and invests Ookiep, April 4.

Thanks to the foresight and energy of Major Dean, manager of the Cape Copper Company and, until the siege began, the officer responsible for the defences of the town, Ookiep was excellently fortified. On a perimeter of five miles there were fifteen strong blockhouses, skilfully disposed and wired, and a number of sangared positions, while there was a plentiful supply both of provisions and ammunition. The garrison, if of varied composition, was numerous enough. 661 half-castes, 206 European miners, mostly untrained to the rifle, 44 of the 9th Warwickshire Militia and 12 of the Cape Garrison Artillery, with a 9-pounder and a Maxim, made up a total of 923 officers and men. An Australian officer, Major Edwards, in charge of the outer line of defence, Major Dean in charge of the inner line, Captain Freeland the

Defences and garrison of Ookiep.

C.R.A., and Captain Macdonald, Intelligence officer, all did good service. Desultory attacks began on the 8th, and on the 10th one blockhouse was captured. But it was not till the night of the 12th, when the Boer delegates at Pretoria were retiring to rest after their first conference with Kitchener, that Smuts made his principal assault. It was easily repulsed, and with considerable loss to the rebels.*

Attacks on the town, April 8–12.

French sends relief by sea, April 13.

French, meanwhile, was taking measures to relieve the town. Since an advance overland from the south, besides being a lengthy and cumbrous task, would have removed Stephenson's and Haig's columns from districts where they were badly wanted, a maritime expedition was fitted out. By the 13th two transports from Cape Town, bearing Colonel Callwell's column† and five companies of the 4th East Surrey (Militia) Battalion under Colonel Sulivan, had reached Port Nolloth, and were followed a little later by a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. Colonel Cooper, hitherto commanding at Cape Town, was sent to take charge of the whole expedition, with Callwell as second in command.

The relief of Ookiep, April 13–May 3.

For forty-five miles eastward from Port Nolloth the railway crosses a sandy and waterless desert. Then it climbs a rampart of steep and rugged hills and, bending sharply to the south, reaches the high plateau where the mining settlements stand. Over the sandy plain the railway, happily, was intact; for Smuts, after forcing back upon Port Nolloth the garrisons of the few blockhouses which stood upon the line, took no trouble to prevent their reoccupation or to damage the permanent way. When Cooper arrived, he found that Captain Macdonald and Lieutenant Meyrick, with some platelayers and half-castes, had already seized the blockhouses commanding two viaducts on the mountain slope, and that Major Logan, Commandant of Port Nolloth, had made complete preparations for the landing and forwarding of the field-force. Thanks to the slackness of Smuts, the Militia, immediately on their arrival, were able to seize the foothills and

* A curious feature of the siege was the use, first by the rebels and then in retaliation by the defenders, of dynamite bombs.

† Callwell's Column:—5th Lancers, 109; 116th and 118th Cos. I.Y., 170; 1 sq. Cape Police; two guns 44th Batt.

establish an advanced base at Annenous, where there was water and healthy air. Nor was there any determined opposition to the further advance on Ookiep. The viaducts being intact, Klipfontein, the summit, was reached without difficulty and the march continued on foot. A series of very strong positions were abandoned one after the other by the rebels, and on May 3 Cooper and Callwell, who, though they met with feeble resistance, deserve all credit for their difficult march, entered Ookiep. Latterly the siege had degenerated into a mere blockade, conducted with so much mutual good humour that on one occasion a challenge to a football match was carefully considered by the garrison and eventually declined. On April 26 Smuts had been summoned to Pretoria to join in the final deliberations, and thenceforward even the blockade was little more than nominal.

Close of the campaign in the Colony, May.

With the relief of Ookiep the campaign in the west came to an end. Since four-fifths of the rebels were in the west, while only a fifth (pertinacious and pugnacious, it is true, out of all proportion to their numbers) sustained the contest in the midlands and north-east, it may be said that the Cape Colony campaign ended in the early days of May. It was a case of stale-mate. In seven months Smuts had succeeded in raising the number of men in arms to 3,000, six-sevenths of whom were rebels and one-seventh Boers. Tactically he had inflicted far more loss than he had suffered; none of his bands had met the fate of Lotter's; none, unhappily, had ever received a sound beating. Strategically, by means of an insignificant abstraction from the fighting strength of the two Republics, he had kept one of the best British generals and eight or nine thousand Imperial troops actively employed in defending British territory. There was no reason why he should not have persisted for an indefinite period in the same sort of campaign. But to what end? Smuts knew very well that the main purpose of the campaign, a general rebellion, had failed, and it was in this spirit that he travelled to Pretoria in May.

French's conduct of the campaign.

With full allowance for his great and manifold difficulties, French's conduct of the war in the Colony leaves a sense of disappointment. Himself the most able and vigorous of

cavalry leaders, he can scarcely be said to have stamped the impress of his personality upon the operations under his charge. He began well, but as time went on his energy dwindled. Nevertheless he had achieved what was most important. The war in Cape Colony had been kept within manageable limits, and a tribute of warm praise is due to the many British column-commanders whose untiring efforts had contributed to that end.

II

The Campaign in the Free State, March and April 1902

Fourth drive prepared, mid-March.

Such was the situation in the Cape Colony. In the Free State we brought the campaign up to March 11, when the third great drive, with its very scanty results, ended in the gloom caused by De la Rey's successes in the Western Transvaal. Before that gloom had been dissipated, a fourth drive in the same thrice-belaboured district was arranged. The troops employed were those of Rimington, Nixon, Garratt, Elliot and Barker, about 14,000 rifles in all. Rimington being temporarily on sick leave, his place was capably filled by Colonel Baldock of the R.A. Mounted Rifles.

The drive, March 20–April 5.

On the evening of March 20, these forces, in the order named above, stood on a north and south line from Heilbron on the northern blockhouse line to Doornkloof on the southern blockhouse line. From this line they were to drive clear across to the Drakensberg; but instead of pressing ahead at high speed, with excessive strain to man and beast, the line was to advance slowly, reprovisioning periodically from the blockhouse lines and taking time to search for hidden depôts and skulking parties of the enemy. There was another novelty. As soon as the Liebenberg's Vlei was passed, the line was to be preceded by an advanced force, first Garratt's and later Baldock's, whose function was to find and break up any Boer concentration which might threaten to crush or pierce the thin driving line. As in all the three previous drives, the whole movement was controlled from headquarters. It began on the 21st, and as far as the

Vlei, whose west bank was reached on the 23rd, all went smoothly. If there were no captures to speak of (for the district happened to be nearly deserted*), there were plenty of Boers further to the east and none had broken back. Now, however, it began to rain, and the rain, falling with relentless persistence for ten days, upset the whole scheme and involved the force in some extraordinary vicissitudes. Garratt, according to programme, left the line, which was closed up behind him, and hastened ahead to cross the Wilge at Strydpoort Drift. On the night of the 24th, in black darkness and a driving storm, he lost his way and reached the Wilge at its junction with the Hol Spruit. Usually a succession of deep pools connected by stony shallows, the river was now in roaring yellow flood. Groping down the left bank Garratt came on the morning of the 25th to Strydpoort Drift, and here Gordon's column was just able to cross, but Dunlop and White, owing to another sudden freshet, were left behind. Meanwhile, the main driving line, having succeeded in fording the Liebenberg's Vlei before the flood came down, was in its turn brought up short by the Wilge. On the 26th, the whole army, Gordon alone excepted, was between two impassable rivers, unable to advance or retire. Gordon, isolated on the further bank, was in a position of some danger; for Manie Botha, with a considerable force, was not far distant. There were no boats or bridging materials, and although Gordon could have replenished his supplies from the Tafel Kop depôt, the march thither appeared so hazardous that he was forced to submit to semi-starvation until the 28th, when Dunlop passed a cable across and sent supplies by a raft.

The deadlock.

The deadlock, which was curiously similar to that experienced a year before by French in the Eastern Transvaal, lasted till the 30th, when Baldock, sick of inaction, countermarched back to the junction of the Vlei and the Wilge, crossed the former river by swimming and the latter by the bridge at Frankfort, and marched east to the Bothasberg, which he reached on April 2. By this time the Wilge had fallen, enabling Garratt and Nixon to cross. The drive now

Second phase of the drive, Apr. 2–5.

* Nixon discovered three Krupp guns sunk in the Rhenoster river.

proceeded, but with no better success, through the maze of ravines between the Wilge and the Drakensberg. Manie Botha broke back through White's New Zealanders on the night of the 2nd, other Boers evaded the line in one way or another, and on the 5th, when the columns reached the Drakensberg, the total results in *personnel*, 86 Boers killed or captured, were scarcely better than those of the third drive, though the seizures of stock and transport were considerably greater. Baldock, Nixon and Garratt now marched slowly to the Natal railway, Elliot and Barker to Harrismith.

Other events in the Free State, Mar.–Apr.

Of the rest of the Free State there is nothing important to relate. In the middle of March, General Tucker, after a long and able tenure of the command at Bloemfontein, gave place to General Charles Knox, and Knox's group of columns, which had so long been prosecuting the "area" system in the south-east, first in the Ladybrand district and latterly in the Senekal district, was broken up. Bulfin and Basing, as we saw in the last chapter, joined Rochfort's group on the Vaal. Pilcher and Ternan, in the latter half of March and the first part of April, operated in the north-west, where de Wet's momentary appearance had galvanised Badenhorst into activity, with the result that the Constabulary posts in that district stood in some peril. That Badenhorst retained power for mischief was shown on April 8, when Ternan dispatched a party of 200 men from Bultfontein to clear some farms at Hartenbosch. The whole force, after a feeble resistance, was captured by Badenhorst.

The situation in the Free State, mid-April.

It will be seen from this brief review that in the middle of April, when the Boer Governments met Kitchener at Pretoria, the situation in the Free State was not one from which conclusive arguments could be drawn by either side. If the Boers were deeply dispirited, they, like the Cape Colony bands, had not received any sound drubbing. There were still nearly 7,000 burghers at large. Even in the north-east, which during the last eleven weeks had been four times scourged by armies working on scientific principles, there were 3,000 Boers, well armed, fairly well mounted and, although most destitute of transport, fairly well fed. In the south-east and west, where for a long time past a condition

approaching tranquillity had reigned, and where large areas had been rendered unfit for human habitation, the commandos, though far less enterprising than their sturdy compatriots of the north-east, were on the whole better equipped and by no means contemptible. Badenhorst had 1,000 men in the north-west; Froneman nearly as many in the Winburg district; Brand and Nieuwhoudt about 800 in the far south. It is true that the nerve-centre of resistance was in de Wet's own country, the north-east; and it is true that the drives had damaged this region greatly and had worried it still more; but it was significant that the last two efforts had shown a great falling off in results. Generals were already experimenting with the new model drive, only to find that every fresh expedient left unremedied fundamental weaknesses, while the Boers, under the compelling stimulus of the new tactics, grew more wary, mobile and resourceful[1]

III

The Campaign in the Transvaal, March and April 1902

In a military sense, the Transvaal presented much the same aspect. It will be remembered that Louis Botha, with a following of 500 stalwarts, had abandoned the high veld at the end of February and betaken himself to the south-east, where among the wild mountains and deep forests of the Vryheid district he was tolerably safe from pursuit. This region, where there were still 700 local men afoot, had always been the despair of British generals. Here French's great movement of a year before had spent itself in impotence; and here six months ago Botha himself, after the failure of his raid on Natal, had slipped through a host of enemies on his way to regain the high veld. He did the same now. Bruce Hamilton, controlling Spens, Mackenzie, Allenby and Stewart, reached Vryheid on March 5, and conducted some toilsome operations, obstructed by deluges of rain, in the difficult country to the east and south-east, while Colville was sent to guard the line of the Buffalo, in case Botha should attempt another raid on Natal. On the

The pursuit of Botha in the south-east, Mar.–Apr.

13th, by a clever stratagem, Hamilton captured a party of thirty Boers, among whom was Botha's brother-in-law, General Cherry Emmett. But this was the only success. Hamilton marched north again and regained Ermelo on April 5; Botha, who had crept up the Swazi border to the Piet Retief district, only came into British ken when he heard that a messenger was seeking him with a summons to join the Conference at Pretoria.

The high veld, the north-east and the far north, Mar.–Apr.

During Bruce Hamilton's absence from the high veld, Park, Wing and Ingouville-Williams had fared no better than he. Throughout the first half of March, this group had been chasing that slippery entity, the Transvaal Government, and when on the 22nd the Government entered the British lines, the columns operated in the Ermelo and Bethal districts. Evasion, carried to a fine art, was practised by the commandos, so that there were practically no results. North of the Delagoa line nothing notable had happened. Scattered between Balmoral and Pilgrim's Rest, Muller, W. Viljoen and other leaders had 2,000 men, but without a spark of initiative and thankful to be let alone. Only in the far north had the Boers exhibited enterprise. Just when Smuts, 900 miles to the south-west, was descending upon Ookiep, Beyers invested Fort Edward, a post near the village of Louis Trichard. As Colonel Harrison, Commandant of Pietersburg, had not enough troops to dislodge Beyers, Colenbrander was sent up in support. Driven away from Fort Edward, the Boers took post at Malipspoort. On April 8–9 Colenbrander drew round them a cleverly contrived net, and in a fight lasting two days killed or wounded 20, took 108 prisoners and the whole camp equipment. Beyers and the rest slipped away, and two days later retaliated by ambushing a party of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, who lost 48 men in casualties and prisoners.

Lawley in the "protected area," March.

That the spirit of offence still lived was shown by another incident, which happened on the eve of the Pretoria Conference. By the irony of events the "protected area" east of Pretoria and Johannesburg had become one of the least secure in the Transvaal. We may remind the reader that Piet Viljoen had been settled in it since January and that

prolonged efforts to dislodge him had ended on February 18 in the minor reverse of Klippan. Since that date Viljoen had roamed with impunity over the area, and at the end of February had been joined by General Alberts of Heidelberg, who, at the beginning of the second drive in the Free State, had been driven by Rawlinson out of the Zuikerboschrand. At the time Kitchener could spare no troops, but when the third drive was over he sent up Colonel Lawley with the 7th Hussars and Bays to operate from Springs. On March 31, after some uneventful operations, Lawley was at Boschman's Kop. His intelligence was that there were two small Boer laagers of 200 men apiece ten and twelve miles to the east, at Enkeldebosch and Steenkoolspruit, and possibly a third further to the south-east. Lawley was an enterprising officer and at once planned a night raid. The Bays were to march on Enkeldebosch an hour after midnight; the 7th Hussars, with the guns and wagons, were to wait till daylight, and then to march to the farm of W. Pretorius at Rietfontein, five miles south-east of Enkeldebosch.

Action of Boschman's Kop, Apr. 1.

The Bays, only 312 strong, under Colonel Fanshawe, with 40 National Scouts to guide them, under Major Vaughan of the 7th Hussars, reached Enkeldebosch at 3 A.M. on a dark rainy morning and stumbled to their great astonishment on a large Boer laager. It was that of Generals Alberts and Piet Viljoen, who had recently joined forces to the number of 800, with the curiously contrasted objects of discussing the question of peace and of crushing Lawley should he give them a chance. Completely surprised, the Boers at first fell into great disorder; Commandant Pretorius, galloping off in a Cape-cart, was taken prisoner by Vaughan, and many horses stampeded. Then the enemy rallied, and Fanshawe, realising that he had to deal with greatly superior numbers withdrew his force for a mile to a good position on a kopje and waited for the dawn. With daybreak came a determined Boer attack. As in the Western, so in the Eastern Transvaal, during this their last serious action, the Boers showed remarkable dash, charging on horseback, reckless of losses, up to the muzzles of the British rifles. The Bays fought no less fiercely. A whole troop of twenty-three men

belonging to Captain Ward's squadron, was put out of action on the southern flank; Major Herron commanding another squadron was killed; Major Vaughan and Captain Mullens were wounded, and fought on notwithstanding. Three successive attacks had been repulsed when a reserve force of Boers, riding round to threaten the rear, made a retirement imperative. So long as defensible positions could be found on the line of retreat, the cavalry fell back with the utmost steadiness by alternate squadrons; but the last seven miles to Boschman's Kop were a dead level plain and here the combat resolved itself into a neck-and-neck race. *Ventre à terre* over the plain both sides galloped, the British in tolerably close order, the Boers in loose "swarm" formation, their wings overlapping the line of cavalry and their centre pressing hard upon it, sometimes even mingling with it. If the Bays had carried swords in this action direct evidence might have been thrown on the relative merits of the rifle and the *arme blanche* in the hands of men on horseback; but so far as it goes, however, the evidence is all in favour of the rifle; for the Boers during this race unquestionably shot many men with saddle-fire whom they never could have touched with any steel weapon. Troopers fell fast; Captain Walker, the surviving squadron leader, was killed, and in spite of the nerve and coolness shown by Fanshawe, Vaughan and other officers, the position of the Bays grew exceedingly serious. Fortunately, the 7th Hussars and the guns had not yet left the camp at Boschman's Kop. As soon as the chase was observed the guns, opening fire over the heads of the retreating Bays, immediately checked the pursuit, and a squadron of Hussars, riding out in support, brought it to a standstill. Though Lieutenant Leyland, with a handful of men, made a plucky attempt to charge, no general counter-stroke was launched by the fresh troops.

Significance of the action.

The losses of the Bays were 77, and those of the Boers about half that figure. Beside showing what exact intelligence was necessary if the designer of a night raid was not to be hoist with his own petard, the action illustrates in a pointed way the general military situation at this period.

Sick of war and longing for peace, the Boers retained their old tactical vigour and in some, though by no means in all districts, were ready, if a favourable opportunity occurred, to fight at an instant's notice as keenly as ever.

Kitchener prepares to drive the high veld, mid-April.

It was now plain that the Eastern Transvaal, blackened desert though much of it was, was still unconquered. The night raid was obsolete. Shy and wild as grouse in December, the few Boers left in the high veld had learnt to counter every subtlety of that once formidable system. For the fourth time within fifteen months, Kitchener was compelled to flood the high veld with driving columns. This time the new model was to be applied with overpowering force. Rimington, who now resumed his command, Garratt, and Nixon were transferred from the Free State and united by degrees with the two groups already on the spot, that of Park, Williams and Wing, and Bruce Hamilton's group under Mackenzie, Spens, Stewart and Allenby. Lawley's column and the Scots Greys were added later. Over this army of 15,000 men Bruce Hamilton, like Ian Hamilton at the same date in the Western Transvaal, was given the supreme field-command. In this quarter, however, the reform came too late to have any marked effect.

The first drive, Apr. 12–14.

Bruce Hamilton got to work just as the Pretoria Conference was beginning. The area chosen was the quadrilateral formed by the Ermelo blockhouse line and the Natal, Delagoa, and Vereeniging-Pretoria railways; roughly speaking, the western half of the high veld. It was driven in two sections. Starting on April 12, Park, Williams, Spens, Allenby, Stewart, Wing and Mackenzie swept southward from the line Carolina, Great Olifant's Station, and on the 14th reached the Natal railway between Standerton and Val Stations. The result, 134 prisoners, was fairly good, and the arrival of Rimington, Garratt and Nixon, all thoroughly versed in the new tactics, gave promise of still better things. Williams and Allenby now left the command; Lawley's cavalry joined it, and on the morning of the 18th the whole force prepared to tackle the intractable "protected area." Mackenzie, Spens, Garratt, Nixon, Rimington and Lawley, counted in order from

The second drive, Apr. 18–20.

right to left, formed a line stretching from Waterval Station to the Nigel Mine, and drove northwards. Park and Wing reinforced the line of Constabulary posts on which the right flank was to rest, and in the final stage the Scots Greys came out from Irene to reinforce the left. Otherwise the left flank was wholly in the air. The drive was a failure. Piet Viljoen, scenting trouble, had already left the district, and Alberts, though he had never yet been fished for by one of Kitchener's drag-nets, kept his head and swam adroitly out. On the night of the 18th, he doubled round the left flank of the night picket-line, darted south with 500 men, forced the Natal Railway blockhouses almost under the eyes of the Heidelberg garrison, took a little rest in his old haunt, the Zuikerboschrand, and rode on to the Free State. How he had lived during the last two months was a mystery; for the country was a wilderness. Not a beast, not a field of standing corn, not a native was left. Some trampled mealie fields, offering a niggardly harvest to very careful gleaners, were the only signs of sustenance. Hamilton reached the Delagoa Railway on the 20th, and a few days later drove south over the same area. This time there was practically nothing to drive.

The Boers escape.

The situation in the Transvaal, mid-April.

In the Transvaal as a whole, at the time of the Pretoria Conference, there were close upon 12,000 Boers in arms; 600 in the far north, 2,100 in the north-east, 3,800 in the east, and 5,500 in the west. The last figure, considerably higher than that for any other district in the field of war, showed the comparative immunity De la Rey's men had enjoyed during the last year and a half. Here, if anywhere, it might well have seemed, was a stronghold of resistance. Yet there was one still more significant feature, namely, the desperate plight to which the high veld of the east was reduced. It was not more desperate indeed than that of many tracts in the Free State, but whereas the Free State leaders were distinguished by a fanatical tenacity of purpose, Louis Botha, whose life for the last year had been spent almost wholly in the high veld, whose ears were full of bitter complaints from commandos peculiarly his own and at the same time peculiarly exposed

DIRECTIONS

Blockhouse Lines

Blockhouses at Vaal Drifts (from October 1901)

S.A.C. Posts

with the date of their completion

Driving Lines

The Blockhouses along the lines of railway were more or less completed in July 1901, although additional Blockhouses were built subsequently to strengthen the lines. The Kimberley-Mafeking line was never completely blockhoused.

THE WESTERN TRANSVAAL

A reference map for all the operations referred to in Vol. V., & illustrating in particular:-

The first drive 23rd-24th March 1902.
and last " 7th-10th May "

SCALE OF MILES

5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15 20 25 50

Spottiswoode & Co Ltd Lith London

DIRECTIONS.

1 Hectorspruit, 17 Sept. 1900
2 Pretorius Kop.
3 Macmac.
4 Spekboom R. 2 Oct.
5 Boschhoek, 13-30 Oct.
6 Draaikraal, 31 Oct.-13 Nov.
Steelpoort R., 14 Nov.
Paardeplaats, 30 Nov. 1900-5 Apr. 01.
Pietersburg, 8-12 Jan. 1901. (3 members of Govt.)
Near Pan Station 6 Apr.
Spitz Kop Farm 9 Apr.
Rietspruit, 16 & 23 Apr.
Beginderlyn, 19 Apr.
Vyfhoek, 21-22 Apr.
Vlakfontein, 2 May
Klipbank, 3 May.
De Emigratie, 11 May
Mooiplaats, 12-16 May
Spitz Kop, 17 May
Isihlele R., 26 May.
Piet Retief, 6 June
St Helena, 8 June
Lang Kloof, 9 June
De Emigratie, 12 June
Van Oudtshoornstroom 14 June
Kranspoort, 15 June
Kalbasfn, 16 June
Yzervarkfn
Driefontein 18 June
Rietspruit, 19 June
Strehla, 23 June
Kromdraai, 28 June-1 July
Wildebeestfn 3 July
Kaffir Kraal 4 July
Eerste Geluk, 5 July
Rietfontein
Onverwacht, to 17 July
Zwakfontein, 18 July
Graspan
Vaalbank
Uitkomst, 5 August
Uitgezocht, 6-9 August
Klipbank, 10 August
Compies R., 11-12 August
Schimmelhoek, 13-16 August
Delport, 17-27 August
Athole, 28 Aug.-12 Sept.
Maryvale 14-17 Sept.
Bellskop, 20 Sept.
Nerston, 21-23 Sept.
Athole, 24 Sept.-16 Oct.
Mooiplaats, 17-24 Oct.
Klipstapel, 25 Oct.
Kranspoort, 26-30 Oct.
Brakfontein, 31 Oct-3 Nov.
Roodepoort, 4-12 Nov.
Tafel Kop, 13-14 Nov.
Kranspan, 14-22 Nov.
Smithfield, 23-25 Nov.
Twyfelaar, 26 Nov.
Windhoek, 18 Dec.
Paardeplaats to 6 Jan. 1902.
Windhoek, 7-21 Jan.
Oshoek, 21 Jan
Grady's Farm, to 9 Feb.
Witpoort, 10 Feb.
Bothasberg, 11 Feb.
Langkloof, 13-17 Feb.
Stroomwater, 17 Feb.
Zwartfontein, 28 Feb.
Stroomwater 29 Feb.-6 Mch.
Witnek, 11 & 14-21 Mch.
12 March
Balmoral, 22 March.

to the enticing propaganda of the National Scouts, could not but view with profound concern the prolongation of hostilities.

The military situation as a whole, mid-April.

Widening our horizon to include the whole theatre of war, we find that in the middle of April 1902 there were in round numbers 23,000 armed Boers and rebels still to be disposed of, about half, that is to say, of the number in existence a year before. How many could be described correctly either as fighting men or as potential fighting men it is exceedingly difficult to say; but it would be unsafe to eliminate more than a small proportion. Generally speaking, the process of attrition had gone on from the bottom, and was in effect a process of selection. Although, a year before, the proportion of laggards to stalwarts was certainly high, it was necessary, as we pointed out in Chapter X, to make large allowance for the cross-current which converted laggards into stalwarts. Similar allowance had to be made now, and it was the failure, throughout the guerilla war, to make this allowance that produced such extraordinary errors in the official British estimates. The intelligence agents, who had a spy in every Boer laager and claimed to be able to count, almost to a man, the commandos in the field, did not reckon the scattered laggards and, at this period, consequently, under-estimated the Boer strength by more than a half.

CHAPTER XXI

PEACE

I

Opening of negotiations. The Boer proposal and its rejection.

On the morning of April 12, in a room in Kitchener's house, conquered and conqueror met.* Such, in fact, was the position; but a scene of tragi-comedy was yet to be played before the position was acknowledged by the Boer delegates. Although informal conversations with British officers had already bred misgivings in their minds as to the proposal of peace they were now about to tender, the proposal, none the less, was made with solemn and magnificent audacity. After a sympathetic welcome from Lord Kitchener, Acting-President Burger read it, article by article, as it had been drafted at Klerksdorp. The Republics were anxious to conclude "an enduring treaty of friendship and peace" with the British Government. To secure it they were prepared to enter into a customs, postal and railway union with the adjoining British colonies, to grant the franchise to the Uitlanders, and to concede equal rights to the English language in the schools. There should be mutual amnesty, and all future differences should be settled by arbitration, the arbitrators being chosen by the two parties from their own subjects—a distinct concession, we may observe, on the part of State Secretary Reitz to the views once expressed by Mr. Chamberlain.† Sublimest touch of all, the Republics offered, as an earnest of their goodwill, to demolish the forts

* In describing the negotiations the author is much indebted to Mr. Kestell's work, 'Through Shot and Flame,' and to the appendix contributed by Mr. Kestell to de Wet's book, 'The Three Years' War.'

† See vol. i., p. 309.

at Pretoria, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. Mr. Burger sat down, and President Steyn, whose weakness and suffering were visible to all, rose to explain that the character of the proposal was determined by the desire of the delegates to secure a lasting peace. Their one purpose in coming was to attain "the object for which the people had fought." Kitchener, with a gesture of astonishment, interrupted him. "Must I understand from what you say that you wish to retain your independence?" "Yes," said Steyn, "the people must not lose their self-respect." A hollow discussion began. Kitchener urged submission, promised future self-government, and entreated the delegates to banish all thought of independence, and negotiate in a sensible spirit. Both Presidents declared the Governments had no constitutional power to make any proposal which sacrificed independence. For a time there was a complete dead-lock. At last Kitchener consented, as a matter of form, to transmit the Boer proposal to the Home Government, although, as he remarked, the answer was a foregone conclusion. The proposal, therefore, in all its naked absurdity, was cabled to London. The British Government replied emphatically that it could not "entertain any proposals based on the continued independence of the former Republics which have been formally annexed to the British Crown." Kitchener and Milner were to make that point quite clear to the Boers, and encourage them to put forward fresh proposals excluding independence.

Boers refuse to submit proposals excluding independence and ask for consultation with burghers.

The second meeting took place on the morning of the 14th. On this, as on all subsequent occasions, Lord Milner attended. He was introduced to the delegates by Lord Kitchener, and the conference began. In a few moments it was plain that though difficulties and delays loomed ahead, another step had been gained on the road to peace; for in spite of the official answer, there was no rupture. The Presidents, however, still insisted that without consulting the people they had no power to negotiate on any other basis than that of independence. They refused, therefore, to submit fresh proposals from which independence was excluded. But, they urged, let the British Government, on its part, submit alternative proposals which the delegates

in their turn might submit to their people. After another dead-lock, followed by a short adjournment, the point, as far as their powers went, was conceded by the British representatives. Kitchener undertook to advise his Government to state the terms they would be prepared to grant subsequent to the relinquishment of independence. But meanwhile the delegates had come forward with two fresh demands; first, that one of their European representatives should be permitted to join them; second, that an armistice should be granted to enable the delegates to consult the burghers. The first request was refused absolutely; the second was allowed to stand over pending the British Government's answer on the main question. It was while waiting for this answer that the delegates heard with dismay of Kemp's defeat at Roodewal.

British Government submit Middelburg terms. Arrangements for convention at Vereeniging.

Mr. Chamberlain's despatch arrived on the 16th, and was laid before the delegates on the 17th. While giving expression to the surprise of the Government at the attitude adopted by the Boers, it authorised Kitchener and Milner to refer the delegates to the offer made a year before at the Middelburg Conference, and to intimate to them that although the subsequent course of the war justified the Government in proposing far more onerous terms, they were willing, nevertheless, "to accept a general surrender on the lines of that offer." After a short private confabulation the Boer delegates repeated the two demands referred to above. The first, once more, was refused; but in the matter of an armistice Kitchener agreed to a compromise, to the extent of granting such facilities as were indispensable for consultation with the burghers. It was arranged, accordingly, that the delegates should have free use of the railway and telegraph, and that military operations should be so conducted as to allow opportunities for holding meetings all over the country. At these meetings sixty burghers, thirty from each country, were to be chosen to voice the will of the people. From the 11th of May immunity was promised to all commandos whose leaders should be chosen as representatives—a concession tantamount to a general armistice operative from that date; and on the 15th of May these representatives were to meet

their Governments at a national convention to be held at Vereeniging, on the frontier of the two countries. Then the final verdict was to be communicated to the British authorities.

On the 18th of April the delegates left Pretoria.

II

Attitude of Boer leaders.

Thus ended the first phase of these strange negotiations. It marked an ill-defined, yet no less certain, advance towards peace. The Boer Governments had discovered that the prolongation of the war since the Middelburg Conference had made not the slightest difference to the resolution of the British to accept nothing short of an absolute surrender of their national independence. The sacrifices the burghers had made in the year that had passed, the successes they had snatched on many a battle-field, the enormous burden of expenditure they had forced upon their enemies, had produced not the faintest impression. The annexations were treated by the British as settled facts not even open to discussion. To surrender all the people had fought for or to go on fighting, these were the only alternatives open to them. Confronted with the same choice a year ago, the Free State had unhesitatingly declared for continuance of the war. The Transvaal had complied, less confidently, perhaps, but still hopeful of achieving something better than terms which offered no more than the British would give in any case. But now even Steyn and de Wet were not prepared on their own responsibility to force the continuance of the war. The decision was too momentous; they must consult the burghers. For themselves, they were ready to continue to the last gasp, and they hoped and believed that their burghers would be with them. Botha and the Transvaal Government, on the other hand, were only too anxious for peace. But like their allies, though for very different reasons, they, too, were not prepared to take upon themselves the responsibility of their convictions. Surrender they believed to be wise and, indeed, inevitable. But they

would have to persuade their burghers to endorse the fateful decision.

Difference of view between Transvaal and Free State; its causes.

It may seem strange that the Transvaal, the sole author of the war, should, from the first serious reverses onwards, have throughout been inclined to yield, and have only been induced to keep up the struggle by the unflinching determination of an ally who, with unquestioning loyalty, had sacrificed all to a cause doubtful alike in its justice and in its hopes of success. The explanation is not to be sought in any difference of national character. No portion of the Boer peoples surrendered so readily and so whole-heartedly as the inhabitants of fully half the Free State in the early stages of the conquest. The explanation lies first of all in the difference between the men who controlled the affairs and inspired the resistance of the forces of the two Republics. As a statesman before the war President Steyn had played but a weak and embarrassed part. But from the outbreak of the struggle, and more especially after the fall of Bloemfontein, he had stood out above all others as the embodied spirit of uncompromising resistance. It was his unquenchable resolution that inspired lesser men like de Wet with the will to persevere, and transmitted itself to the whole body of burghers in the field. Neither a politician nor a soldier, he was yet, if any man, the national hero of the war. The struggle for him was a sacred principle; its immediate military and political consequences were immaterial; he looked for its results to the future character and destiny of the Afrikander people. The affairs of the Transvaal, on the other hand, after Kruger's departure, were left in the hands of men like Schalk Burger, Botha and Smuts, practical politicians of moderate views, men who had never wholly sympathised with the war policy, who were prepared to continue the struggle as long as there was any hope, however slight, of success, but who were not prepared to sacrifice the practical interests of their people to a mere idea. But in estimating the difference in the individual characters and points of view of the leaders of the two Republics we must also make allowance for the second and no less important difference which lay in the circumstances of the two countries. To the Free Staters the continuance of

the struggle meant the suspension of farming, considerable hardship, the loss of a certain number of lives, and nothing more. Short of extermination, they were bound, sooner or later, to recover possession, political as well as material, of their country. But in the Transvaal the very causes that led to the war were also the causes that compelled peace. The war had been fought to maintain the absolute political supremacy of one-half of the population over the other; its indefinite continuance might end in a complete reversal of the situation. The mines had been restarted and thousands of Uitlanders had already returned to their homes. Thousands more would come as soon as the fenced area was extended, as it inevitably would be before long, by the final clearing of the "high veld." Civil government was already established, and the Boer leaders were threatened with the imminent growth, behind the advancing screen of blockhouses and Constabulary posts, of a new Transvaal, a Transvaal in which the British element was predominant, but which was fast absorbing and identifying with itself not only those Boers who had surrendered early in the war, but an ever-increasing host of "hands-uppers" and National Scouts. A stage would soon come when the British would begin settling these "tame" Boers on the land within the protected areas and adding to them the "tamer" spirits among the prisoners of war, of whom many had already volunteered to serve in the British ranks. Botha and his colleagues in the field could still reckon themselves, in virtue of their position and their prestige, the unquestioned leaders of the Boers in the Transvaal. But the men with them were even now barely a fifth of the adult male white population of the country, and might soon not be a tenth. If they continued the struggle too long, with ever-dwindling forces, the time might come when their own people would begin to look at them less as heroes than as troublesome banditti, and when, even if the sentence of exile were remitted, they would return to their own country as strangers and as defeated public enemies. To make peace while their moral position was still unimpaired was essential, not only for their own personal credit in the future, but for the survival of the Afrikander ideal in the Transvaal.

British differences. Milner's view.

But differences of point of view existed no less on the British side. To Lord Milner every other consideration was subordinate to the necessity of founding the two new colonies immovably on the bed-rock of British supremacy. The settlement secured by such a vast expenditure of blood and treasure must be final. The Boers must be clearly and unmistakably conquered. The spirit of the annexations must be unwaveringly upheld. The ties we had contracted toward our Boer converts must be respected; the sacrifices made by the British loyalists must be recompensed. If a small minority of the enemy persisted in defying British authority long after their territories had been incorporated in the British dominions, long after a framework of British civil government had been established, long after many of their compatriots had enlisted in our army, well, so much the worse for them. The very reasons that made Botha and Smuts eager to come to terms while they and their forces were still a serious factor in the situation, left Milner quite prepared to acquiesce in the gradual petering out of the guerilla war. The longer the Boer leaders could be eliminated from the new Transvaal, whose foundations he was now so carefully laying, the better. With this point of view it was not unnatural that Milner regarded the opening of formal negotiations for peace without enthusiasm and even with grave misgiving, as likely to lead, almost inevitably, to a weakening of our attitude, if not on the main issue of absolute surrender, yet on many points which might seriously prejudice the work of reconstruction.

His fear of a weakening of the British attitude.

And, indeed, the weakening was already manifest in this opening stage of the negotiations. By the proceedings just closed the proclamation of August 1901 had been tacitly annulled; the theoretical structure built on it had crumbled. The first official step in retreat had been Lord Lansdowne's admission to the Dutch Government that Presidents Burger and Steyn, who in theory were outlaws, would be recognised as negotiators. This step was an implicit recognition of all members of both Executive Councils, among whom were Botha, De la Rey, de Wet and Hertzog, generals in the field and outlaws in a double capacity, both military and

civil. The abandonment on our side of unconditional surrender and the definitive offer of terms was itself a concession; still more was the consent to submit these terms to a *referendum* of the "people." For who were the "people"? The answer was, the fighting commandos, all of whose members, in one degree or another, were nominally proscribed. The 37,000 prisoners of war, the male inhabitants of the concentration camps, the 2,500 men who as guides, intelligence agents, or members of irregular corps were serving informally in British pay, the 2,000 National Scouts and Orange River Colony volunteers who had formally rallied to the British flag—none of these classes were to be consulted. Should the fighting men decide to seize the present opportunity for submission, they would come in clothed with that moral and political superiority with which we had hoped to invest those who had thrown in their lot with the conquerors. Even the humblest combatant burgher would bring with him the prestige of having fought to the bitter end under pain of contingent beggary, while the military leaders of the present would inevitably become the political leaders of the future. If the Boer negotiators, in their first audacious proposal, had endeavoured to put the clock back two years and a half, Milner could not help feeling that the British Government, in repeating the Middelburg offer and in sanctioning a popular vote of this character, had in fact put the clock back at least fourteen months. Was all this complaisance necessary? Was it not plain that if we chose to wait we could exact the kind of settlement we needed? Our army was at full strength; the Boers were few and dwindling; whole districts were totally denuded of the means of sustenance, many others were approaching the same condition; we could now concentrate overwhelming forces on definite fenced areas. Finally winter, that dreaded season of cold and scarcity, was just about to begin. In a few months the end must come. Either all the Boers would become National Scouts, or a general collapse would set in. But whether the end came in few or many months, let us, at whatever cost, be true to our own claims and covenants. South Africa had suffered too much in the

past from the futile endeavour to save expense and trouble by conciliating our opponents at the cost of our friends and at the cost of our own honour.

The contrary view in favour of peace by mutual agreement.

But there were many thoughtful Englishmen—of whose views Lord Rosebery was, perhaps, the most eminent exponent—who, while no less convinced than Lord Milner himself that any final settlement must be based on the unquestioned supremacy of the British power, were yet unfeignedly anxious for a speedy settlement, and a settlement on terms agreed to by the Boer leaders. It was not that they shrank from the cost of continuing the war to the "bitter end"; it was the very bitterness of such an end that they feared. With them the arguments which inspired Steyn to plead for unfaltering resistance to the last man were precisely the ones that weighed in favour of peace. They dreaded the remoter consequences of a settlement based on sheer unqualified force. Was it possible to end a nation by the piecemeal capture of the individuals composing it? In their view it was of vital importance that the Boer nation, while it still was an organised nation, should explicitly, and through its leaders, accept incorporation in the British Empire. If we could persuade the commandos to come in all together, shaking hands with them as with the brave foes they were, if we could gain, by means which the leaders alone could give, a complete, simultaneous and whole-hearted surrender, and start at once on the restoration of the ruined territories, all this was well worth the pocketing—if, indeed, it involved the pocketing—of a little national pride, well worth the frank repudiation of a few technical claims which we never could have sustained, and which were not worth sustaining, well worth the abandonment of political expectations which, after all, were but problematical. Could we ever rob the Boer leaders of their prestige? Could we ever prevent its conversion into political influence under the new *régime?* Could we ever set the fighting Boer below the National Scout? Assuredly not. Then why not face the truth, arrest the ravages of war, limit our loss, and begin, in a thoroughly friendly spirit, the process of peaceful fusion under the British flag. After all, we had won. We

had beaten the Boers. We had taken their country. We had saved South Africa.

Kitchener's attitude.

It was this latter view, as has been indicated more than once in the preceding chapters, which Lord Kitchener himself largely shared. It is true that the proclamation of August 1901 was entirely inconsistent with this view; even more inconsistent was the enlistment of the National Scouts, based on the same fictitious assumptions as the proclamation itself. But from Kitchener's point of view the proclamation was just a menace, and nothing more; if it frightened the commandos into submission, well and good; if it did not, there was nothing for it but to return to the Middelburg terms. Admitting that the enlistment of the National Scouts, following so hard upon the failure of the proclamation, seemed to imply a resolve to stand by the menace, was any one, in fact, deceived? Did the Scouts themselves suppose that they would ever be able to hold the scales in the great issue of peace? On the contrary, was it not true, and was it not generally felt to be true, that the Middelburg terms only represented what, in the last resort, we should be compelled under any circumstances to grant? That being so, let us not haggle over forms and details. We had got these Boers into our lines and set them talking; that was half the battle. Induce them, in whatever capacity, to sign away their independence on certain broad and generous conditions, and that was the whole battle. Whether terms were granted them a few months sooner or a few months later would not affect the question of ascendency, which, as far as the near future was concerned, was substantially guaranteed by the course the war had taken, but which must depend ultimately on the relative vitality and fertility of the two races. Continue the war? Well, he, Kitchener, was the best judge of the military prospect. That prospect was not by any means clear. That some commandos would throw down their arms, if peace were not declared at once, was tolerably certain. What the rest would do was unknown. The history of the last year and a half had been one long miscalculation of Boer tenacity. Had we yet reached a point when it was sensible to prophesy? Our military position was

immensely strong; we could denude, concentrate and the rest. But supposing a substantial portion of the Boers, exasperated by a rupture of the negotiations, were to retreat sullenly to regions where all our difficulties would begin over again; to the northern Transvaal, for instance, or—a still more embarrassing possibility—to Cape Colony, where our great auxiliary, devastation, was denied us, and where the campaign, in consequence, had been significantly barren? Such a move, like any other move, could, without a shadow of a doubt, be met. Whatever the Boers did they could be worn down, sooner or later, if necessary to the point of extermination. It was only a question of time and money. Was it worth the time and money? Taught, during his earlier career, to combine efficiency with economy, Kitchener had always chafed under the portentous extravagance of the guerilla war, not, we may surmise, from any peculiar tenderness for the British taxpayer, but from an instinctive hatred of waste—waste inherent in unpreparedness, cumulative waste, under which we paid not only for the maintenance of a disproportionately costly army, but in a great degree for the maintenance of the commandos, and under which, whatever settlement we made, we must eventually indemnify the enemy for much of the loss we had inflicted. Still, the cost of prolonged hostilities was well worth incurring if any decided advantage was to be gained. But the advantage was too problematical. Kitchener was justly proud of his army, but he was not blind to its limitations. His anxieties had not grown less during the last four months. Tweefontein, Klippan, Yzer Spruit, Tweebosch, Boschman's Kop, trivial incidents as they were in the steady progress of the great campaign of attrition, nevertheless showed clearly how formidable was the enemy with whom we still had to cope.

The personal element.

These general considerations were, we may surmise, coloured by a tinge of personal feeling which had no counterpart in Milner's absolute disregard of all but the needs of the task before him. Kitchener, no doubt, preferred to make certain that a war in which he had borne such a tremendous load of responsibility should end in a clean-cut peace which would release him for work more worthy of his

great position as a soldier, rather than it should gutter out to a sordid end for the sake of a political settlement in which he had no concern. He had hoped, by a great military effort, to secure such a peace at a much earlier stage. He had regretted the failure of the Middelburg Conference and had always cherished the idea that, with a little more support from Milner and the Government, peace had been within reach even then. His anxiety to conclude his task had certainly not been diminished by the tremendous moral strain of the year that had intervened. These were not factors that could affect Kitchener's conception of the broad line of policy to be pursued. But it is possible to trace to them a certain haste and carelessness in the conduct of the negotiations—a haste already shown in the premature negotiations at Middelburg—and a readiness to slur over details which might one day become of vital importance, which caused Milner no little anxiety on more than one critical occasion. That anxiety was fully reciprocated by Kitchener, who continually dreaded a rupture of the negotiations owing to Milner's insistence on matters of detail concerning the future which to him seemed comparatively immaterial.

Milner and Kitchener.

This conflict of views and emotions between the two great Englishmen, who at this moment directed the destinies of South Africa, is not one that need be deplored. Each attained his end. The negotiations, often seemingly endangered, were never broken off, and peace was formally ratified, not only by the Boer Governments, but by the whole body of burghers still in the field. Yet in the terms of peace there was not a clause which did not give unequivocal expression to the determination of Lord Milner and of Mr. Chamberlain to secure a final and enduring settlement on the basis of British sovereignty. Throughout the negotiations, and more particularly in the phase yet to come, Milner stiffened Kitchener and Kitchener tempered Milner. It was a curious inversion of the rôles usually assumed by the soldier and the statesman respectively. At the close of most wars the civil representative of the winning side dictates the political terms; while the general arranges the details of the

military surrender and stands ready to back the political terms with a cheerful invitation to further war. But in this, as in most other respects, the South African War had a unique character of its own.

An open question.

On the wider question whether such a peace as was in fact secured, involving, as it did, a certain going back from the attitude adopted in the previous August, was preferable to a settlement based on unconditional surrender or on the inexorable stamping out of all resistance, no final pronouncement can be made in our day. The ultimate test, the test of time and experience, has still to come. It may be that those who favoured peace by mutual agreement laid too high a value upon formal undertakings elicited by the compulsion of overwhelming force; they may have failed to realise that peace on such terms, even if it guaranteed the security of the British flag, involved the perpetuation of a political tradition which the war so far had only scotched, not killed. It may be, on the other hand, that Milner overestimated the moral transformation, great as it apparently was, which the individual burgher or even commandant underwent on capture; he may have exaggerated the moral strength and unity of the British element in the population upon which, as the solid basis, he hoped to build up the Transvaal of the future; he may have relied too much on the stability of British politics at home as a condition of the successful carrying out of the task of reconstruction. To some extent the verdict on these issues can never be otherwise than conjectural. The one certain fact that stands out is, that when peace came it was because the will of the British people, as expressed in its efforts in the field, had been unmistakably imposed on our stubborn enemies. The British soldier, if he did not shoot as straight and skirmish as well as the Boer, was feared as well as respected. He represented what the Boer knew was an immutable resolve to conquer; and in very fact he had conquered. Meanwhile he, in his turn, had learnt a sincere respect for the Boer, which he transmitted to the nation and the Empire at large; for this army, so largely composed of volunteers, was in a very peculiar sense a microcosm of the nation and the

Empire. Of all wars ever waged, this war, in spite of much-expressed bitterness and many apparent grounds for bitterness, was the most good-humoured. That is not merely a fact to be recorded with pious complacency, it is a fact of profound political significance.

III

The Boer meetings, April 18–May 15.

History records no precedent for the state of affairs which existed in South Africa between April 18 and May 15, 1902. War went on, but, to borrow a metaphor from football, the ball of war was continually rolling into "touch." Kitchener loyally carried out his undertaking to the Boer leaders. Commandos were allowed to assemble and confer unmolested; officers and messengers scoured the country by road and railway with free passes, passing through British outpost lines, receiving the unstinted hospitality of their foes, and occasionally, to the chagrin of a junior British officer, undergoing accidental capture, followed by immediate release on the production of the magic pass.* Steyn, indeed, was too ill to take part in all this activity and had retired to a farm near Wolmaransstad. But de Wet, with amazing energy, travelled over the whole of the Free State, inspiring the burghers with his leader's fiery spirit. At eight successive meetings he personally addressed practically the whole of the commandos and secured unanimous resolutions against any surrender of independence. The Transvaal leaders were scarcely less active, though the purport of their activity was by no means the same.

The last phase of the war. Elliot's drive in N.E. Free State.

Faithfully as Kitchener kept his compact, outside its strict limits he prosecuted the war with ruthless energy. Delicate matter as it was to dovetail warlike measures into peaceful deliberations, the feat was successfully accomplished. Two great forces were in existence, Ian Hamilton's in the Western Transvaal, Bruce Hamilton's in the Eastern Transvaal. It will be remembered that the latter general

* There is a story, *ben trovato* at any rate, that de Wet himself had this experience, to the disgust of a young subaltern, who imagined he had won deathless renown for the capture of the guerilla chief.

was just concluding his last drive in the high veld when the Pretoria Conference broke up. He now prepared to descend upon the third of the old centres of resistance, the North-Eastern Free State, already four times driven, but still unsubdued. The divisions of Elliot * and Barker had already been beating up the commandos in this tormented district. Both had raided in the valleys of the Wilge and Liebenberg's Vlei, and Elliot had made an incursion into the Brandwater basin, where Rautenbach's Bethlehem commando, which had stormed the blockhouses on April 8, was still causing alarm. The incursion, like the other operations, met with little success, and the only event of importance was the capture on May 1 of Commandant Manie Botha of Vrede, one of the toughest and wiliest of all de Wet's commandants. Wounded in a skirmish early in April, he had been carried to a farm near Bezuidenhout's Drift, on the Wilge. Barker raided the farm from Frankfort and took him prisoner, together with twelve of his following.

Bruce Hamilton's last drives in N.E. Free State, May 1–10.

On the next day, May 2, Bruce Hamilton drew up his columns between Vereeniging and Greylingstad, drove south on the 3rd and 4th as far as the northern blockhouse line, and formed up from Kopjes Station to Frankfort on a front of sixty miles; 200 prisoners had been taken. Elliot now ranged his force along the southern blockhouse line between Kroonstad and Lindley; Barker deployed along the Liebenberg's Vlei; and on the 6th Hamilton's driving-line, with its right on the railway and its left on the Vlei, swept south towards Elliot. The whole distance of forty miles was covered by daylight, and an endeavour was made to push the tactics of rapidity to their logical extreme. Not only was no transport taken, but late on the night of the 5th Hamilton issued an order that guns were to be discarded. This order, which unfortunately failed to reach some of the columns, was in strict accordance with the theory underlying the drive; for it is clear that a line in continuous and rapid

* Colonel De Lisle, who for a year had commanded one of Elliot's columns, was transferred in the middle of April to Ian Hamilton's army in the Western Transvaal, where he commanded one of Thorneycroft's new Australasian columns. His place in Elliot's division was taken by Brig.-Gen. Little.

movement cannot bring guns into action without loss of symmetry. Even without them the task of preserving dressing was beyond the power of the troops. A patch of bush, a kloof, an enclosure produced inequalities in the line which there was no time to correct.

Most of the Boers break through.

Bereft of the guidance of their principal leaders, worried and harassed by the pitiless succession of blows dealt upon their country, it is remarkable how the Boers rose to every fresh test imposed by every change of British methods. Hitherto they had been accustomed to pierce the picket-line at night if they could not evade the flanks of the driving-line by day; now, under the rapid British onset they were compelled to throw stratagem to the winds and to charge the driving-line in broad daylight. And now, as of old, the deep-rooted tactical weaknesses which originally had called the driving system into being, told their tale. The British had no answer. Marksmanship was deficient; resisting power was deficient. Most of the Boers broke through—van Coller, with 300 men, on the extreme left; Mentz, with 300 more, through Elliot's line at Deelfontein. The drive, however, continued the process of attrition; 121 prisoners fell into Hamilton's hands. A return drive two days later over the same ground produced only 22. On May 10 the columns came into the railway.

Ian Hamilton's last drive in W. Transvaal, May 7–11.

On the following day the last shot was fired in the Western Transvaal. Sir Ian Hamilton in this quarter had endeavoured to perfect the driving system on different lines. He pinned his faith on a slow advance covering several days, fortified by an impregnable night picket-line and directed towards an impregnable line of blockhouses. The ground chosen was one of the least promising in the theatre of war. Turning a deaf ear to pessimistic counsels, Hamilton resolved to drive westward to the Vryburg-Mafeking railway line. Both flanks for several days would be open; the last stages of the march would cover country that was almost waterless; the enemy, though Roodewal had damped their spirits, were still unbroken. Hamilton believed, however, that by stratagem added to overwhelming force, directed with scientific deliberation, he might overcome all difficulties.

His force had been strengthened latterly by Thorneycroft's new Australian division, 2,400 strong,* and by Rochfort's division, whose recent labours on the south bank of the Vaal had not been very fruitful. With the existing forces of W. Kitchener, Rawlinson and Kekewich, Ian Hamilton had a fine field force of nearly 17,000 men. On May 7, however, when operations began, Rochfort was still south of the Vaal, and to bring him into line at the crisis of the drive was a somewhat delicate problem.

Ian Hamilton's scheme.

Hamilton's scheme was to drive westward from the line Rooirantjesfontein-Koranafontein on an initial front of thirty miles, extending finally to fifty miles, and to strike the railway between Brussels Siding and Doornbult Siding. The time to be occupied was five days, and the distance to be covered by the main driving-line was eighty miles, giving an average march per day of only sixteen miles. Unprecedented efforts were made to render the railway blockhouse line impassable. Six armoured trains were concentrated at Vryburg; 900 Guardsmen and three battalions of Militia were thrown into the blockhouses. It is important to notice that the railway from Vryburg northward bends sharply to the north-east, so that the northern wing of the driving-line would impinge on the barrier before the centre and left. During most of the drive, however, one or both flanks were bound to be open.

His difficulties and devices.

The right must be open till the third night when Kekewich, with the right-hand column, first touched the railway. The left must be open till the fourth night when Rochfort, marching from the south, linked up with W. Kitchener and prolonged the line crescent-wise to the railway. How, in the meantime, were the Boers to be kept in front of the line? Hamilton relied on stratagem.

* Thorneycroft's Force:—

Colonel De Lisle's Column (1,120).—1st Australian Commonwealth Regt. (Lt.-Col. Lyster); 2nd Australian Commonwealth Regt. (Lt.-Col. M'Leish); Thorneycroft's M.I.; two guns 42nd Batt. R.F.A.; one pom-pom (Q Section).

Colonel Ingouville-Williams's Column.—5th New Zealand Contingent (Col. Davies); 3rd New South Wales Bushmen (Capt. Thompson); two guns 42nd Batt. R.F.A.; one pom-pom (Q Section).

His first ruse was to scatter false despatches, from which it appeared that the army was to turn to the right-about, after two days and drive back eastward. This ruse, it was calculated, would have effect at least until the third night, when the right flank was secured. There remained the fourth day, when Rochfort's division on the left was still in the air. Since it was of the utmost importance to persuade the Boers that the yawning gaps on either side of Rochfort were filled, Hamilton arranged for small detachments to kindle the veld, fire off rifles and generally to make a demonstration.

The last "bag."

These stratagems had comparatively little effect. Kemp had dispersed his commandos to the four winds, so that probably there were never more than 1,000 Boers in front of the driving-line, three-fifths of whom edged quietly away to the north and the south. On the fourth night, however, when Rochfort completed the cordon, there were still 300 Boers within the trap. Behind the 300 stood 17,000 British troops, impregnably intrenched. Thorneycroft, for example, had dug redoubts at intervals of a hundred yards on a front of six miles, and had filled each interval with wagons linked by barbed wire. Kitchener's redoubts were fifty yards apart. In front of the 300 were six armoured trains and forty-five miles of blockhouses, manned by 4,000 infantry and natives. Under a blaze of electricity from the search-lights those of the Boers who had horses roved round the trap, seeking in vain for the least opening; there was none, and nobody escaped. It was the night of May 10, the last before the armistice. But the Boers had now crossed the Transvaal border and the armistice did not apply to them. On the 11th, when the line closed upon the railway, the total results of the drive were 367 prisoners. Although this was the largest haul which had yet been made in the Western Transvaal, analysis showed here, as elsewhere, that nothing more than attrition was at work. The Boers taken were the siftings of many commandos, the least fitted, in body and in spirit, to survive. There was no symptom of any general collapse.

Discussion of driving methods.

The question arises which of the two generals in the last drives of the war was working on the right lines—Bruce Hamilton with his rapid daylight sweeps, or Ian Hamilton

with his slow methodical advance and his impregnable night picket-line? The evidence, so far as it goes, seems to prove that there was little to choose between the two systems. It was impossible to combine the advantages of both, because human strength has limits. Men who have ridden forty miles cannot dig themselves in impregnably; men who have ridden sixteen miles can; but they lose the advantage of surprise and increase the chances of a mobile enemy. Even if we imagine an ideal compromise, in which all the results of experiment were harmoniously united, in which numbers, symmetry, fortification, unity of command, stratagem, had said their last word, the result must have ultimately depended on that indispensable factor, tactical excellence in the open field.

The Boer delegates assemble.

From the 12th of May onwards the tension of war relaxed. From far and wide the delegates elected by the commandos travelled to the meeting-place. Though the rules governing the armistice did not, of course, apply to Cape Colony, General Smuts, interrupted in the middle of the siege of Ookiep, was transported by sea from Port Nolloth to Cape Town and thence sent to Vereeniging. Nine hundred miles from Ookiep, Beyers left his ragged bands in the Waterberg to travel to the same destination. Chris Botha came from the Swazi Border, Van Heerden from the Zwartruggens, Nieuwhoudt and Brand from the banks of the Orange, Wessels from the rushing rivers and wild ravines of the Drakensberg. From north, south, east and west of the vast theatre of war they came to decide their nation's destiny.

IV

Opening of the Vereeniging Conference, May 15.

On the 15th of May, 1902, a cold, misty morning, the sixty delegates and the members of the two Governments came together at Vereeniging.* Two camps, one for each

* ALPHABETICAL LIST OF DELEGATES.

FOR THE TRANSVAAL.

1. H. A. Alberts, General, Heidelberg.—2. J. J. Alberts, Commandant, Standerton and Wakkerstroom.—3. J. F. De Beer, Commandant, Bloemhof.—4. C. F. Beyers, Assistant Commandant-General, Waterberg.—

State, had been pitched in close proximity, and between them stood a large marquee tent in which the convention was to be held.

It was a remarkable gathering. It was pre-eminently a

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5. C. Birkenstock, burgher, Vryheid.—6. H. J. Bosman, Landdrost, Wakkerstroom.—7. Chris Botha, Assistant Commandant-General, Swaziland, State Artillery.—8. B. H. Breytenbach, Field-Cornet, Utrecht.—9. C. J. Brits, General, Standerton.—10. J. G. Celliers, General, Lichtenburg.—11. J. de Clercq, burgher, Middelburg.—12. T. A. Dönges, Field-Cornet, of the town of Middelburg.—13. H. S. Grobler, Commandant, Bethal.—14. J. L. Grobler, burgher, Carolina.—15. J. N. H. Grobler, General, Ermelo.—16. B. T. J. Van Heerden, Field-Cornet, Rustenburg.—17. J. F. Jordaan, Commandant, Vryheid.—18. J. Kemp, General, Krugersdorp.—19. P. J. Liebenberg, General, Potchefstroom.—20. C. H. Muller, General, Boksburg.—21. J. F. Naudé, burgher of Pretoria.—22. D. J. E. Opperman, Field-Cornet, Pretoria South.—23. B. J. Roos, Field-Cornet, Piet Retief.—24. P. D. Roux, Field-Cornet, Marico.—25. D. J. Schoeman, Commandant, Lydenburg.—26. F. C. Stoffberg, Acting Landdrost, Zoutpansberg.—27. S. P. du Toit, General, Wolmaransstad.—28. P. L. Uys, Commandant, Pretoria North.—29. W. J. Viljoen, Commandant, Witwatersrand.—30. P. R. Viljoen, burgher, Heidelberg.

FOR THE ORANGE FREE STATE.

1. C. C. F. Badenhorst, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Boshof, Hoopstad and West Bloemfontein.—2. A. J. Bester, Commandant, Bethlehem.—3. A. J. Bester, Commandant, Bloemfontein.—4. L. P. H. Botha, Commandant, Harrismith.—5. G. A. Brand, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Bethulie, Caledon River, Rouxville, Wepener, and East Bloemfontein.—6. H. J. Bruwer, Commandant, Bethlehem.—7. D. H. van Coller, Commandant, Heilbron.—8. F. R. Cronje, Commandant, Winburg.—9. D. F. H. Flemming, Commandant, Hoopstad.—10. C. C. Froneman, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Winburg and Ladybrand.—11. F. J. W. J. Hattingh, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Heilbron and East Kroonstad.—12. J. A. M. Hertzog, Commandant, Philippolis.—13. J. N. Jacobs, Commandant, Boshof.—14. F. P. Jacobsz, Commandant, Harrismith.—15. A. J. De Kock, Commandant, Vrede.—16. J. J. Koen, Commandant, Ladybrand.—17.—H. J. Kritzinger, Field-Cornet, Kroonstad.—18. F. E. Mentz, Commandant, Heilbron.—19. J. A. P. Van der Merwe, Commandant, Heilbron.—20. C. A. van Niekerk, Commandant, Kroonstad.—21. H. van Niekerk, Commandant of bodyguard to President Steyn.—22. J. J. van Niekerk, Commandant, Ficksburg.—23. J. K. Nieuwhoudt, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Philippolis, Fauresmith, Jacobsdal and part of Bloemfontein.—24. H. P. J. Pretorius, Commandant, Jacobsdal.—25. A. M. Prinsloo, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Bethlehem and Ficksburg.—26. L. J. Rautenbach, Commandant, Bethlehem.—27. F. J. Rheeder, Commandant, Rouxville.—28. A. Ross, Commandant, Vrede.—29. P. W. De Vos, Commandant, Kroonstad.—30. W. J. Wessels, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Harrismith and Vrede.

The Free State delegates.

gathering of fighting men. Whether influenced or not by Kitchener's promise of immunity to commandos whose leaders were sent to Vereeniging, the burghers, in electing their representatives had chosen all their most prominent leaders in the field. This was particularly noticeable in the case of the Free State. De Wet's six "Assistant-Chief Commandants," Badenhorst from the north-west, Nieuwhoudt from the south-west, Hattingh, Wessels and Michal Prinsloo from the north-east, Brand and Froneman from the south-east, were all present. The rest, with one exception, were Commandants who had won their positions by capable leading. Mentz and van Coller of Heilbron, who had led so many spirited charges against driving-lines and picket-lines; Ross and De Kock of Vrede, who had struck down Damant at Tafel Kop; Rautenbach of Bethlehem, who only a month ago had been storming blockhouses in the Brandwater Basin; Jacobsz of Harrismith and Koen of Ladybrand, who had hurried up from distant parts to join in the assault at Tweefontein; Bester and Bruwer of Bethlehem, who had also climbed the cliffs of "Yeomanry Kop" on that famous Christmas Eve; C. A. van Niekerk of Kroonstad, who as leader of Steyn's bodyguard had guided his President for nearly a year through innumerable dangers and snares; all these were present. Steyn himself had come to Vereeniging, but his health had gone from bad to worse, and he was now too feeble to take any public part in the conference. Probably he foresaw its outcome and was glad enough to be silent. For himself, disease and exposure, so far from shaking, had hardened and embittered his resolution. In that sombre, stormy figure the republican spirit lived incarnate.

The Transvaal delegates.

The Transvaal delegation was somewhat differently constituted. The principal generals, it is true, were present; Kemp, Liebenberg, Du Toit and Celliers from the west; Beyers from the far north; the fiery Muller from the north-east; and from Botha's immediate command in the east, H. A. Alberts of Heidelberg, Chris Botha of the Swaziland Police, J. N. H. Grobler of Ermelo, and Britz of Standerton. Smuts came from Cape Colony. But there were only seven commandants against twenty-two from the Free State, while

there were six field-cornets, four burghers of the rank and file and two non-combatants, the landdrosts of Wakkerstroom and the Zoutpansberg.

The most cursory study of names and districts shows the tenacity of the resistance made by the two Republics. No commando had been extinguished, and in the course of the last year strangely few of the prominent leaders had been removed by death or capture. The faces most missed among the Free Staters were those of Haasbroek, killed in December, 1901, Olivier, killed at Tweefontein, and Manie Botha, captured just three weeks ago. Ben Viljoen's capture in January, Sarel's in February, and Emmett's in March, were not serious losses to the Transvaal, though the deaths of Opperman in December and Potgieter in April certainly removed two ardent leaders from the field. In the matter of organisation the two armies were intact. Whether they still retained the will and the strength to fight was another matter.

The Boer organisation still intact.

After a formal meeting in the morning, at which General Beyers was elected chairman and Messrs. van Velden and Kestell secretaries, the convention met at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. At the very outset the advocates of peace were confronted with a serious difficulty. The Free State delegates, thanks to de Wet's exertions, and a few of the Transvaalers from the north and west were bound by explicit pledges to vote against any surrender of independence. If those pledges were valid then there was nothing more for the conference to decide. The continuance of a hopeless struggle or the discredit of a separate surrender, such was the dilemma which Schalk Burger and Botha had to face unless this difficulty of the mandate could be surmounted. President Burger opened the debate by explaining that no terms were possible with the British Government unless they included the surrender of independence. In guarded phrases he urged submission. But the decision must be unanimous; the difficulty as to the capacity of the delegates must in some way be got over. A letter, five months old, from the delegates in Europe, was read out, describing the international situation with vague optimism,

The question of the mandate. Botha's decided intervention.

and then the chairman called on Commandant-General Botha. Botha determined to take the bull by the horns. Were the delegates irrevocably pledged by their mandates? If so there could be no united action. He asked for an assurance on the point before anything further was done. It was a critical moment. Would the Free Staters take the hint and come into line, or would they force their allies' hands? Hertzog rose to save the situation. Speaking as a judge, he declared that it was a principle in law that a delegate could not be a mere mouth-piece, but must be a plenipotentiary with the right to vote as he thought best. Smuts concurred. Happily the Boers have a peculiar reverence for law, and the opinion of the lawyers so far satisfied the assembly that the legal point was never again raised. But it was plain that the moral obligation still weighed heavily on the Free Staters. The attempt to prejudge the issue against peace had been foiled. But peace was not yet in sight.

Botha's report. De Wet's reply.

Having gained his point Botha proceeded with his report. He drew a most gloomy picture of the east and south-east Transvaal. Reviewing district after district, he showed that some of them could hold out a month or two, that others were on the verge of starvation. In the whole country between Vereeniging and Ermelo there were thirty-six goats and no cattle whatsoever. The horses were worn out and scarcely able to move. In the whole of the Transvaal he estimated there were 10,816 burghers in the field, of whom nearly a third had no horses. The commandos had lost 6,084 men since June 1901. The women still in the field were in a pitiable state, and the attitude of the natives, as exemplified by the Vryheid massacre, was becoming serious and was producing a very dispiriting effect on the burghers. De Wet, in a curt speech, hinted that resistance was just as possible as it was a year ago, and gave the meeting to understand that De la Rey shared this opinion. More than 6,000 men were in the field in the Free State, of whom only 400 were unfit for service. The Basutos, he said, were friendly to the burghers; on the women he was silent.

The rest of the first day was devoted to reports from

the delegates upon the condition of their districts and commandos. The cleavage of opinion was unmistakable. The Free State was for war; the Transvaal was inclined, strongly but not unanimously, toward peace. The reports differed less in matter than in manner. In both countries there were areas of plenty, in both areas of extreme scarcity. Against the despairing cry of most of the delegates from the Eastern Transvaal that they were on the verge of utter ruin, Badenhorst and van Niekerk, for the north-west Free State, disclosed a condition of affairs scarcely less serious, but declared that, partly by captures from the British, partly by clandestine agriculture, they could hold out for many months longer; and Nieuwhoudt, while admitting that the south-west had long been a blackened wilderness, claimed that he had wrung, and could still wring, sustenance from it. Prinsloo for Bethlehem, and Froneman for Ladybrand, gave rosy reports of their districts, and minimised the difficulties. The spokesmen from the Western Transvaal took a less hopeless view than their eastern colleagues. Liebenberg, indeed, was pessimistic as regards the prospects of the Potchefstroom district. But Du Toit of Wolmaransstad and De Beer of Bloemhof each made speeches of brighter colour, and finally Kemp, speaking for Krugersdorp, Pretoria and Rustenburg, scouted the idea of want. From the Marico northward to the Zoutpansberg the Kaffirs were his commissariat, and he took from them what he wanted. This, too, was the view of Beyers and Muller, though both of them dwelt on the growing restiveness of the natives under the process. Smuts described the nine months he had spent in Cape Colony, and declared that he had over 3,000 men in arms. But he complained of the scarcity of horses, and told the meeting frankly that there was no hope whatever of a general rebellion. As he told the assembly later, "the Colony even now is not ripe for the policy we have been pursuing in regard to it." The hopes President Kruger had cherished with regard to it had proved vain.

Reports of the delegates. Contrast between Transvaal and Free State.

It is interesting to notice that the blockhouse lines, permeable as they had been to resolute assaults, had had a marked effect in obstructing communications between one

Effect of blockhouse lines and native attitude.

district and another. Among some commandos profound ignorance reigned as to the condition of others; and some delegates whose reports were good, when they heard the black descriptions of others, were evidently inclined to waver. Another remarkable point was the prominence assumed by the native question. It was from the kraals that many commandos had been driven for some time past to obtain provisions, and the natives in many districts were beginning to refuse assistance, while in some they were actively hostile.

Second day. Reitz's proposal for cession of gold-fields. Botha's appeal for peace.

On the 16th the prospect of an agreement on the main issue appeared more slender than ever. Facts fell into the background and sentiment ruled the debate. Kemp made another bellicose speech ending with the words, "As far as I am concerned, unless relief comes, I will fight on till I die"; but Du Toit showed signs of wavering. De la Rey was still eloquently silent. Speaker after speaker from the east drove home the moral that resistance was futile, that honour was satisfied, and that to save the country from irrevocable ruin they must have peace. More than one of them declared that if the Conference decided for war their burghers would go straight to the nearest English camp and lay down their arms. Rheeder of Rouxville gave voice to the irreconcilable element on the Free State side. Agreement seemed remoter than ever when State-Secretary Reitz made an unexpected diversion by proposing a partial cession of territory—of the gold-fields, that is, and Swaziland—together with a relinquishment of the right to control foreign relations. The proposal, intrinsically absurd as it was, fell like oil on troubled waters. Smuts and Hertzog, together with the two Presidents, having been deputed to draft it in proper form, discussion continued on calmer lines, the schism somewhat blurred by the dim shadow of a compromise. Mr. Burger, in a weighty speech, addressed himself to the task of preparing the burghers for the submission which he believed to be inevitable. The war could not be carried on any longer. Ten districts in the Transvaal would have to be abandoned. It was all very well to make fine speeches for posterity. Could any of the speakers maintain with a clear conscience that they really hoped for success? Celliers of

Lichtenburg, who led the finest and best-equipped commando in the field, although he ended by declaring for war, spoke with a very different voice from Kemp. Late in the evening there was a call for the great leaders, Botha, De la Rey and de Wet. Botha's view was already known, but he now expanded it. The blockhouses were an intolerable obstruction, and were likely to prove the ruin of the commandos; food was scarce; horses were weak and few; the sufferings of the women were terrible, now that the British had ceased taking them into the concentration camps; foreign intervention was a dream; a general rising in Cape Colony was out of the question; the enforced abandonment of so many districts had allowed the British to concentrate their efforts in crushing force on the remainder; lastly—weightiest reason of all perhaps with the speaker—their own people were turning against them. "If we continue the war, it may be that the Afrikanders against us will outnumber our own men." By all means let them cede the gold-fields, "that cancerous growth," if such a partial cession was possible; if not, let them save their country by making the best terms possible. Terms might still be secured which would save the language, customs and ideals of the people. The fatal thing was to secure no terms at all and yet be forced to surrender. "We are slipping back—we must save the nation."

De la Rey supports Botha.

Then De la Rey spoke. The old lion of the Western Transvaal knew full well the responsibility which lay on him. With a long roll of successes behind him, with troops trained to the last pitch of tactical excellence and only just beginning to feel the deadening weight of hostile numbers and organisation, with that reservoir of supplies from the Kaffirs which Kemp had alluded to, with Kemp's buoyant spirit and brilliant leading to support him—with all this at his back he knew very well that if war was the word he and his could prolong the war for many a long month, and that the weight of his counsels might well turn the scale against peace. He does not seem to have hesitated. Chivalrous in the field, he brought to the council tent a gentle spirit and a calm judgment. He could fight, he said, but the

countries as a whole could not. Starvation and misery were rife; intervention had always seemed a dream to him. The opportunity for negotiation might never recur. Fight to the bitter end? The bitter end had come.

De Wet's plea for war.

The effect of his speech was lasting, but when de Wet rose, racial hatred, national pride, invincible determination to conquer or die, once more found utterance. Bluntly pointing out that this was the Transvaal's war, he taunted the Transvaal with being the first to yield. The condition of his own people was just as bad; nine districts had been abandoned, but only to be reoccupied. Whatever happened the Free State would not give in. Even Reitz's proposal he could not accept; the gold-fields were essential to the Republics. The discouragements and miseries of the situation were undeniable, but they showed the hand of God. "He is minded by this war to form us into a nation worthy of the name."—"This is a war of religion." The speech ended the day's session.

The second Boer proposal.

On the 17th Smuts and Hertzog presented a draft proposal under four heads:—

(1) Foreign Relations and Embassies to be given up; (2) a British Protectorate over the two States; (3) cession of certain territories, for instance Swaziland and the Witwatersrand; (4) defensive alliance with Great Britain. The proposal was ratified, and a commission consisting of Botha, De la Rey and de Wet, with the two lawyers Smuts and Hertzog, was deputed to proceed to Pretoria and negotiate on that basis; and, if that basis was ruled out, on any lines they thought fit.

V

The Boer Commission at Pretoria. Rejection of the second proposal, May 19.

It may fairly be surmised that none of the shrewd and able men thus chosen had the least illusion as to the futility of their proposal. Yet when they met Kitchener and Milner at 10 o'clock on May 19, they propounded and defended their scheme with inimitable *aplomb* and a certain ingenuous ardour which, from all who love good acting, must extort warm admiration. Affecting to forget that a month before they

had refused to submit fresh proposals, and in their turn had elicited the offer of the Middelburg terms, they now not only ignored the Middelburg terms, but produced a proposal of their own in direct conflict with them. Not that this conflict was admitted, for Smuts and Hertzog were intrepid enough to argue that there was no substantial contradiction between terms which included "a defensive alliance" and terms which treated the late Republics as annexed colonies. This was flatly ridiculous; yet Kitchener was only paying the penalty for the vagueness of his pronouncement in April. When, after a long and futile discussion, Milner asked for an answer to the British proposal, Smuts replied that there was no definite proposal, only a "basis"; and there was a certain amount of truth in the observation. Still, fence and quibble as the Boers might, the British were adamant. It was out of the question even to refer the new proposal to the Home Government. "Grant it," said Kitchener, "and before a year is over we shall be at war again."

Signs of yielding. The draft declaration. Appointment of a sub-committee.

The meeting was adjourned over luncheon. Before it resumed there were signs that the Boer Commissioners were yielding. Smuts was sent across to sound the British representatives informally, and, as a result of the conversation, Milner and Kitchener drafted a document for signature by the delegates. In this document "the leaders of the Boer forces in the veld" were made to declare, in their own name and that of the burghers, that they accepted the annexations and the status of British subjects, and agreed to surrender their arms and cease all further resistance. The document went on to state that they did this trusting in the assurance of His Majesty's Government that their personal freedom and property should be respected, and that the future action of His Majesty's Government should be in harmony with a declaration or schedule, to be appended by the British representatives, which was to embody the Middelburg terms. But at the afternoon meeting it became evident at once that the Boer Commissioners were still quite unprepared for so direct and unqualified a surrender, and had still plenty of fight left in them. A hot discussion sprang up. A complete dead-lock seemed imminent, and was

only averted by a suggestion, originally thrown out by Kitchener, that a sub-committee might be appointed to discuss the details of the schedule before the delegates considered whether they should accept the document itself. The direct issue of absolute surrender was thus shelved for the moment. But its possibility was clearly admitted, time was gained to familiarise the more obstinate spirits with the idea, and a great step towards peace was achieved. In the appointment of the sub-committee the military element was eliminated, and the negotiations were left in the hands of Smuts and Hertzog, the legal advisers of the two Republics, and, on the British side, to Lord Milner and his legal adviser, Sir Richard Solomon.

The draft treaty. Its character.

The sub-committee at once took in hand, not merely the framing of the schedule, but the drawing up of a complete draft settlement. For two days the Boer lawyers battled keenly and ably for concessions, but with little result. On the question of form they secured an alteration which was undoubtedly calculated to make the terms more acceptable to the proud spirit of the Boer leaders. The new draft was in the form, not of a declaration of submission, but of a bi-lateral contract or treaty. More important still, from the point of view of sentiment, the Boer signatories were described in the preamble as acting on behalf of the Governments of the South African Republic and of the Orange Free State respectively. But if to that extent the annexations may be said to have been tacitly waived by the British in the preamble, they were explicitly accepted by the Boers in the body of the treaty. There was no question of the Republics formally abdicating their sovereignty. The opening clause stated boldly that "the burgher forces now in the veld shall at once lay down their arms . . . and shall refrain from any further opposition to the authority of His Majesty King Edward VII, whom they acknowledge as their lawful sovereign." In the second and all subsequent clauses the territories of the late Republics were described as the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, without qualification or explanation. In spite of the flavour of a political treaty introduced into the preamble, the draft was in substance a

military surrender on agreed terms. And the terms were those which the Boers had scornfully rejected more than a year ago.

The treatment of rebels dealt with separately.

Apart from matters of minor consequence, the terms of the new draft differed from the Middelburg draft only in two particulars. The first concerned the Natal and Cape Colony rebels, and was a change not so much of substance as of form, due to the difference in the character of the documents in question. In Kitchener's final letter in 1901, which was a mere declaration of the intentions of the British Government, the treatment of the rebels was directly included. But the present document was in the nature of a contract, and Milner, with an eye to the future, was determined not to allow the treatment of the rebels to be any part of a bargain with those who had incited their rebellion. Quite enough had been conceded to the fighting Boers in allowing them to speak for the whole of their own people in the new colonies; to recognise their claim to speak for the Dutch race throughout South Africa was out of the question. The matter was one in which only the Governments of the two colonies affected and the Imperial Government were concerned. The rebels were sure to be let off remarkably lightly in any case; but their gratitude, if they were capable of feeling any, should be clearly due, not to those who misled them, but to those against whom they had transgressed. But there was no objection to setting the minds of the Boers at rest as regards their own moral obligation. The Colonial Governments were communicated with and a separate document subsequently handed in containing a statement of their intentions. The Government of Cape Colony announced that the rank and file would escape with disfranchisement for life * on surrendering and signing a document declaring themselves guilty of high treason; the leaders would have to stand their trial for their misdeeds, but in no case would capital punishment be inflicted. Natal briefly declared that the law would take its course. With this the Boers had to content themselves.

The question of compensation.

The second difference concerned the payment of the debts, receipts and war losses of the late Republics. At

* Subsequently reduced to five years.

Middelburg this question, too, had assumed great prominence. Botha had made extortionate demands, Kitchener had been evasive, and the Home Government had finally decided to offer a million pounds as compensation for all losses, but commandeer notes and receipts were to be admitted as evidence of such losses. Smuts and Hertzog now endeavoured to secure an improvement on this offer, but no complete agreement was reached, and in the present draft there was merely a promise, in the last clause, that "Government bank-notes issued under Law 1 of the South African Republic" would be honoured without interest. Even this promise had been wrung from Milner with difficulty as a *pis aller* for the recognition of receipts.

The financial discussion. Kitchener suggests a compromise, May 21.

On the 21st the negotiators met once more in full conclave and the draft was read. Botha fastened at once on the question of finance. Other terms were scarcely mentioned, and all the zest, heat and audacity which two days before had been thrown into the sublime battle for independence, the Boer delegates now threw into the prosaic business of bargaining. Not only bank-notes, they insisted, but all Treasury receipts and commandeer-notes issued in the field must be paid in full, whatever the amount. Milner protesting that this in effect was to ask the British to pay the full cost of the Boer resistance, "full" payment was dropped; but as far as the principle went the Boers stood on tolerably firm ground. De Wet pointed out that the Free State had issued no bank-notes, so that under the clause, as it now stood, the Free State would have no relief at all. Botha pointed to the Middelburg clause, and with a reverence he had never yet displayed for the terms of that document, asked if such a serious deviation from it was now to be permitted. It was in vain that Milner argued that the Middelburg clause began with an explicit denial of liability, that it excluded bank-notes and called the million "an act of grace." Retreat was inevitable, and Milner retreated to the million as the limit of payment for notes and receipts. Would that meet the Boer view? "No," said Botha, determined to press his advantage. Then Kitchener struck in. Would two or three

millions be sufficient? The Boers consulted in private and eventually brought up a proposal for three millions, which were to cover all claims, whether in the shape of bank-notes or receipts. Although Milner and Kitchener were by no means agreed as to the justice of the proposal, it was added provisionally to the last clause of the draft.

Issue underlying the discussion.

We must explain the real issue underlying this dispute, which, though it was apparently one of form rather than of substance, was nevertheless one of those fundamental issues which divided Milner from Kitchener. Neither was in the least disposed to haggle meticulously over the amount of compensation to be paid for the destruction wrought by the war; it was upon the way in which that compensation was given that they differed. Provided some definite sum was named Kitchener did not care how it was arrived at. Milner, on the other hand, insisted that it should take the form of a free gift without the least admission of liability, not only because the recognition of anything in the shape of receipts or notes would lead to insatiable claims and endless heart-burnings, but because it would imply a formal consent on the part of the British nation to pay the costs of the enemy. To be generous to the people she had conquered, to do all that was possible to improve their condition and wipe out the traces of the war was England's duty; to compensate the Republics for levying war against her was absurd in principle and politically dangerous. Milner was right, but unfortunately there were expressions in the Middelburg offer which tied his hands, and Kitchener's attitude made a temporary compromise inevitable. To understand the attitude of the Boer leaders we must remember that, after all, what it was a question of principle for Milner to refuse, was also a question of principle, honour and personal prestige for them to insist upon. They had been responsible for all the receipts, they had again and again allayed the doubts of the burghers as to the possibility of repayment. To acknowledge those receipts to be worthless, to allow their signatures to stand dishonoured, spelt moral and political bankruptcy. Every motive, national and personal, that inspired the desire for peace on settled terms was summed up in this question

of finance. The political leadership of the future was involved in the haggling over those receipts, and neither Botha nor Milner were blind to the issue.

The draft submitted to British Government.

Kitchener now explained that the sanction of the British Government must be obtained for these proposals, and the Boers on their side undertook, should such sanction be received, to lay the proposals before the National Convention and to ask a direct answer, "Yes" or "No." Strong to the last for precision and finality, Milner gravely impressed upon the Boers that the document annulled all other proposals, was complete in itself, and must be construed by itself. Within its four walls were contained everything in the nature of definite pledges. This declaration having been made, the draft treaty was telegraphed to England for the approval of the Government.

Correspondence with British and South African Governments, May 21–28.

For a whole week the wires were busy between South Africa and London. It was a long delay, but not too long in view of the vital importance of minutely examining and thoroughly weighing every clause in a treaty which was to be the charter of two new colonies, and in which the least ambiguity might lead to bitter strife. Cape Colony and Natal, too, had to be consulted about the rebels, and some little pressure had to be used in order to obtain a statement of their intentions.

The amended document. Alteration of financial clause.

On the 28th the Conference met once more at Kitchener's house and the final decision of the British Government was read. Except as regards the financial question the draft treaty was very little altered.* There were some slight modifications of form; there was a proviso to the amnesty clause excluding from its protection persons who had done acts contrary to the usages of war. The financial clause was remodelled in a fashion which reduced any concession which had been made on the question of principle to a very minimum. The original draft had spoken of a judicial commission which should examine into all Government bank-notes issued by the Transvaal during the war and all receipts issued in the veld by officers of the late Republics with a view to

* The additions and alterations made by the Home Government are indicated by italics in the text of the treaty.

paying them *pro rata* out of the three millions. In the final version settled between Lord Milner and Mr. Chamberlain the clause simply spoke of a "free gift" of three millions, further augmented by loans on exceptionally easy terms, to be spent by local commissions in each district on repatriation and on the relief of poverty due to war losses. Republican bank-notes or receipts would be accepted as proof of such losses after investigation by a special judicial commission. In other words, the principle of compensation was practically eliminated. The well-to-do burgher could not claim anything whatever. Only the man who had lost his all in reliance on the Republican leaders was to be allowed to plead that fact as a claim to consideration. There was no indication that the relief granted should bear any proportion to the amount of Republican receipts held. Indeed, there was no reason, as far as the document went, why more than a fraction of the three millions should be spent on relief, or why such relief should be granted to a single burgher who had a freehold by the mortgaging or parcelling of which he could raise enough to enable himself to start life again. Again, the three millions were to be spent, not on the fighting burghers or the prisoners of war, but on the "people," and in that term were included all those who had surrendered, and even the National Scouts. But if the clause was uncompromising on the question of principle, the process of reasserting the principle without appearing deliberately to revoke what had been conceded in conference between Milner and the Boer delegates was not exactly conducive to clearness of phraseology. The clause was long-winded and confusing, and easily lent itself to misunderstandings of which the Boer leaders were to make abundant use at a later date, even though the British Government gave far more than it ever promised. The draft ran as follows:

Text of the treaty.

"General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Commander-in-Chief, and His Excellency Lord Milner, High Commissioner, on behalf of the British Government;

"Messrs. S. W. Burger, F. W. Reitz, Louis Botha, J. H. De la Rey, L. J. Meyer, and J. Krogh on behalf of the Government of the South African Republic and its burghers;

"Messrs. M. T. Steyn, W. J. C. Brebner, C. R. de Wet, J. B. M. Hertzog, and C. H. Olivier, on behalf of the Government of the Orange Free State and its burghers, being anxious to put an end to the existing hostilities, agree on the following points:—

"Firstly, the burgher forces now in the Veldt shall at once lay down their arms, and surrender all the guns, small arms, and war stores in their actual possession, or of which they have cognizance, and shall abstain from any further opposition to the authority of His Majesty King Edward VII., whom they acknowledge as their lawful sovereign.

"The manner and details of this surrender shall be arranged by Lord Kitchener, Commandant-General Botha, Assistant Commandant-General J. H. De la Rey, and Commander-in-Chief de Wet.

"Secondly, burghers in the Veldt beyond the frontiers of the Transvaal and of the Orange River Colony, and all prisoners of war who are out of South Africa, who are burghers, shall, on their declaration that they accept the status of subjects of His Majesty King Edward VII., be brought back to their homes, *as soon as transport and means of existence can be assured.*

"Thirdly, the burghers who thus surrender, or who thus return, shall lose neither their personal freedom nor their property.

"Fourthly, no judicial proceedings, civil or criminal, shall be taken against any of the burghers who thus return for any action in connexion with the carrying on of the war. *The benefit of this clause shall, however, not extend to certain deeds antagonistic to the usages of warfare, which have been communicated by the Commander-in-Chief to the Boer generals, and which shall be heard before a court-martial immediately after the cessation of hostilities.*

"Fifthly, the Dutch language shall be taught in the public schools of the Transvaal and of the Orange River Colony when the parents of children demand it; and shall be admitted in the Courts of justice, whenever this is required for the better and more effective administration of justice.

"Sixthly, the possession of rifles shall, on taking out a licence in accordance with the law, be permitted in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony to persons who require them for their protection.

"Seventhly, military administration in the Transvaal and in

the Orange River Colony shall, as soon as it is possible, be followed by civil government; and, as soon as circumstances permit it, a representative system tending towards autonomy shall be introduced.

"Eighthly, the question of granting a franchise to the natives shall not be decided until a representative constitution has been granted.

"Ninthly, no special tax shall be laid on landed property in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony to meet the expenses of the war.

"*Tenthly, as soon as circumstances permit there shall be appointed in each district in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony a Commission, in which the inhabitants of that district shall be represented, under the chairmanship of a magistrate or other official, with a view to assist in the bringing back of the people to their farms, and in procuring for those who, on account of losses in the war, are unable to provide for themselves food, shelter, and such quantities of seed, cattle, implements, etc., as are necessary for the resuming of their previous callings.*

"*His Majesty's Government shall place at the disposal of these Commissions the sum of* £3,000,000 *for the above-mentioned purposes, and shall allow that all notes issued in conformity with Law No.* 1, 1900, *of the Government of the South African Republic, and all receipts given by the officers in the Veldt of the late Republics, or by their order, may be presented to a judicial Commission by the Government, and in case such notes and receipts are found by this Commission to have been duly issued for consideration in value, then they shall be accepted by the said Commission as proof of war losses suffered by the persons to whom they had originally been given. In addition to the above-named free gift of* £3,000,000, *His Majesty's Government will be prepared to grant advances, in the shape of loans, for the same ends, free of interest for two years, and afterwards repayable over a period of years with three per cent. interest. No foreigner or rebel shall be entitled to benefit by this clause.*"

The treaty final.

Milner explained that this document was absolutely final. It could not be altered in any way, but must be submitted just as it was to the National Convention for a direct answer, affirmative or negative. Three days were allowed for the discussion at Vereeniging. By Saturday evening, May 31, the Boers must give their answer.

Return of the Boer Commission.

At 7 o'clock the Boer Commissioners left Pretoria for Vereeniging. They had done all that able and determined men could do. But they had met a stronger will than their own, a will, moreover, backed by overmastering material force. In the words of their own official chronicler,* "they had been swimming against a stream that was too strong for them." They had apparently failed to secure any substantial result for all their efforts during the discussions or for all the costly struggle that had preceded their acceptance of the idea of peace. But there was one thing they had secured—unless the British proposals should be rejected by the delegates at Vereeniging—and that was a position which, given favouring circumstances, might yet make them, under the British flag, masters in their own country.

VI

Their reception at Vereeniging. Steyn's resignation, May 29.

Next morning opened the last act in the long drama of the war.

Steyn received the Commission in his tent and devoted his last words as President of the Orange Free State to a fierce denunciation of the treaty. A few hours later he formally resigned his office, nominated de Wet as acting President, and was driven away to a British hospital.

The Commissioners entered the conference tent and their report was read out, followed by the text of the draft treaty itself. For a few moments there was a sombre silence; then a number of questions from delegates as to the meaning of the various clauses. For hours, as though in a vain effort to shirk the inevitable, the desultory questioning dragged on. At length it guttered out, and there was a pause which nobody cared to be the first to break.

The last debate, May 29-30.

Finally a Transvaaler, Mr. De Clercq of Middelburg, rose and spoke for submission. The Free Stater Nieuwhoudt instantly moved that a vote be taken at once. It was a bold bid for war, for a vote taken at that moment would certainly have been warlike. But the demand for delay and

* J. D. Kestell, 'Through Shot and Flame,' p. 323.

discussion could scarcely be resisted; the opportunity slipped away, and a long debate began. It lasted during the rest of this day and the whole of the next. To all appearances the cleavage of opinion was as deep as ever. Though Kemp and Muller were still irreconcilable, the rest of the Transvaalers, generals and burghers, soldiers and civilians alike, argued for peace on the terms now offered. All the arguments were theirs. Half the national army were prisoners of war; nearly four thousand had been killed; the rest were weakening and dwindling hourly; twenty thousand women and children had died in the concentration camps; thousands more were perishing on the veld. There was no help from Cape Colony, no help from Europe, no help from the sympathetic minority in England itself. Without a general surrender there would be a piecemeal surrender, far more shameful to a proud people. "The delegates might go away determined to fight," said De la Rey, "but the burghers would lay down their arms." That, added Beyers, decided the issue. The insuperable obstacle to further resistance was not the military situation, but the spirit ruling the burghers, a spirit that was driving them over to the enemy.

De Wet and the Free Staters appeal against acceptance.

In the teeth of the facts the Free Staters could not argue. De Wet, indeed, made an effort to present a military and political case. He declared that there was plenty of ammunition; he hinted at a general movement to the Cape Colony or distant parts of the Transvaal; he intimated, with a certain artful simplicity, that silence in Europe meant sympathy about to grow active; even in England, he argued, "Pro-Boer" meetings had been largely attended, and that sympathy might be regarded, for all practical purposes, as a sort of indirect intervention. Lastly, as a desperate expedient for relieving the sufferings of the women on the veld, he suggested that they should gain admittance to the camps by taking with them a proportion of burghers. But cold reason found little expression in his or any of the Free State speeches. It was a sacred war, they urged. Faith in God compelled them to fight for their independence. Two years ago, at Prinsloo's surrender, doubters had wailed that all was

over; again and again since that time the counsels of despair had been heard; and yet here they were with the national spirit still unquenched, able still to fight, and negotiating on equal terms with an enemy who, so far from growing in haughtiness with the lapse of time, had become, if anything, more pliable.

The tide running strongly for peace.

The scene recalls one of those elemental contests which may be observed off any of our rocky headlands when a powerful tidal current runs counter to a storm of wind. Seemingly the combatants are equally matched. Their shock and strife are formidable. The surface waters are smitten into seething whirlpools; the steep curling breakers toss hither and thither and tumble in frothy cataracts; but beneath all this tumult, whose hoarse grumble may be heard for many a mile, the tide presses inflexibly forward. He who steers a vessel to windward through such a clamorous "race" is conscious of this curious phenomenon, that the wind seems to increase in violence as the worst turmoil is reached. It is an illusion due to the growing speed of the tide as it bears the vessel into the teeth of the wind. And so with the Boer debate. Under the gusts of warlike eloquence the current of peace ran deep and strong, and the stronger it ran the fiercer the gusts it met; for many a Boer who anticipated the inevitable issue of the struggle, felt—with a very human frailty—that he could safely indulge in heroic sentiments which would be remembered by his children, without imperilling peace. Once again the advocates of war raised the moral obligation of their mandate for independence, and once again Hertzog used the opportunity to intervene on behalf of peace. He enumerated the considerations in favour of yielding: the exhaustion of the country, the weakness of the horses, the pitiable condition of the women on the veld, the danger of moral decay in the camps, strongest argument of all, the fact that their own people were taking arms against them. Yet none of these considerations, he declared, would have weighed with him. It was the "fatal error" of holding the conference at all, it was Botha's own speeches and those of others which made further resistance almost hopeless. Reluctant, apparently, to sever himself irrevocably from his

fellow-countrymen, he concluded with ambiguous truisms. But the whole tenor of his speech had indicated surrender. Once more Botha, recapitulating all the disastrous conditions that prevailed, poured the light of reason and humanity on the situation. De Wet might make much of the deputation in Europe not being allowed to come to South Africa; it was the Transvaal Government themselves that had advised them not to come because their return would have been a death-blow to the hopes of the burghers. As for the idea of marching in a body to Cape Colony, had not de Wet had some experience of the Colony himself? For his own part he had advocated peace ever since the Governments met at Waterval,* and all that had happened since had but proved that he was right. Muller having intervened with a passionate refusal to vote for peace, Smuts rose to speak. Flattering the pride of the war-party he conceded that the Boers were still "an unconquered power"; but the question was not military but national, and it was the lasting interests of the nation that the delegates—as citizens, not as soldiers—had to consider. Then, striking a new note, by subtle suggestion rather than by direct argument, Smuts urged that the present sacrifice of independence was a step absolutely necessary in the pursuance of a grander aim. The sacrifice upon the altar of freedom would not be in vain. Perhaps it was God's will "to lead our nation through defeat, through abasement, yes, and even through the valley of the shadow of death, to the glory of a nobler future, to the light of a brighter day." The debate continued as hotly as ever, but the first definite sign of yielding in the Free State ranks appeared when Mentz of Heilbron declared openly that the war could not be continued and that it was a waste of time to argue the point any further. Schalk Burger, at greater length, reiterated the same argument, and to the cry of a "war of faith" retorted bluntly that it had been a war of miscalculation. "We had confidence in our own weapons; we under-estimated the enemy; the fighting spirit had seized upon our people; and the thought of victory had banished that of the possibility of defeat." When the meeting

Botha and Smuts urge peace for the sake of national existence.

* See chap. xi., p. 296.

adjourned late in the evening it was common knowledge that there was a majority in favour of peace.

May 31. The vote for peace secured by de Wet's intervention.

Nevertheless, on the morning of the 31st, *summa dies et ineluctabile tempus*, the breach still yawned between the two parties. Nieuwhoudt moved the rejection of the British terms; P. R. Viljoen their acceptance. But now, to his great honour, de Wet interposed. Earlier in the morning he had yielded to a strong personal appeal from Botha and De la Rey to use his influence in favour of a unanimous vote. With this aim he proposed an adjournment, and at a meeting held in his own tent persuaded all but a few irreconcilables to follow his own example, to own themselves beaten, and to come into line with the majority. Even so, agreement was only secured by the suggestion that the acceptance of the British terms should be accompanied by a formal statement which made clear that the acceptance was under protest and due to the hopelessness of continuing the struggle. The statement was drawn up by Hertzog and Smuts, and was moved as a substantive proposal at the afternoon session by Commandant H. P. Pretorius and seconded by General C. Botha.

The Boer declaration.

"We, the national representatives of both the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, at the meeting held at Vereeniging, from the 15th of May till the 31st of May, 1902, have with grief considered the proposal made by His Majesty's Government in connexion with the conclusion of the existing hostilities, and their communication that this proposal had to be accepted, or rejected, unaltered. We are sorry that His Majesty's Government has absolutely declined to negotiate with the Government of the Republics on the basis of their independence, or to allow our Government to enter into communication with our deputation. Our people, however, have always been under the impression that not only on the grounds of justice, but also taking into consideration the great material and personal sacrifices made for their independence, that it had a well-founded claim for that independence.

"We have seriously considered the future of our country, and have specially observed the following facts:—

"Firstly, that the military policy pursued by the British military authorities has led to the general devastation of the

territory of both Republics by the burning down of farms and towns, by the destruction of all means of existence, and by the exhausting of all resources required for the maintenance of our families, the existence of our armies, and the continuation of the war.

"Secondly, that the placing of our families in the concentration camps has brought on an unheard-of condition of suffering and sickness, so that in a comparatively short time about twenty thousand of our beloved ones have died there, and that the horrid probability has arisen that, by continuing the war, our whole nation may die out in this way.

"Thirdly, that the Kaffir tribe, within and without the frontiers of the territory of the two Republics, are mostly armed and are taking part in the war against us, and through the committing of murders and all sorts of cruelties have caused an unbearable condition of affairs in many districts of both Republics. An instance of this happened not long ago in the district of Vryheid, where fifty-six burghers on one occasion were murdered and mutilated in a fearful manner.

"Fourthly, that by the proclamations of the enemy the burghers still fighting are threatened with the loss of all their movable and landed property—and thus with utter ruin—which proclamations have already been enforced.

"Fifthly, that it has already, through the circumstances of the war, become quite impossible for us to keep the many thousand prisoners of war taken by our forces, and that we have thus been unable to inflict much damage on the British forces (whereas the burghers who are taken prisoners by the British armies are sent out of the country), and that, after war has raged for nearly three years, there only remains an insignificant part of the fighting forces with which we began.

"Sixthly, that this fighting remainder, which is only a small minority of our whole nation, has to fight against an overpowering force of the enemy, and besides is reduced to a condition of starvation, and is destitute of all necessaries, and that notwithstanding our utmost efforts, and the sacrifice of everything that is dear and precious to us, we cannot foresee an eventual victory.

"We are therefore of opinion that there is no justifiable ground for expecting that by continuing the war the nation will retain its independence, and that, under these circumstances, the nation is not justified in continuing the war, because this can

only lead to social and material ruin, not for us alone, but also for our posterity. Compelled by the above-named circumstances and motives, we commission both Governments to accept the proposal of His Majesty's Government, and to sign it in the name of the people of both Republics.

"We, the representative delegates, express our confidence that the present circumstances will, by accepting the proposal of His Majesty's Government, be speedily ameliorated in such a way that our nation will be placed in a position to enjoy the privileges to which they think they have a just claim, on the ground not only of their past sacrifices, but also of those made in this war.

"We have with great satisfaction taken note of the decision of His Majesty's Government to grant a large measure of amnesty to the British subjects who have taken up arms on our behalf, and to whom we are united by bonds of love and honour; and express our wish that it may please His Majesty to still further extend this amnesty."

The vote carried by fifty-four to six.

The motion was carried by fifty-four votes to six. The irrevocable decision had been made. The time for speech-making had gone, but Schalk Burger closed the meeting in a few sentences of simple eloquence.

"We are standing here at the grave of the two Republics. Much yet remains to be done, although we shall not be able to do it in the official capacities which we have formerly occupied. Let us not draw our hands back from the work which it is our duty to accomplish. Let us ask God to guide us, and to show us how we shall be enabled to keep our nation together. We must be ready to forgive and forget whenever we meet our brethren. That part of our nation which has proved unfaithful we must not reject."

Peace signed.

The Commissioners travelled to Pretoria, and on the same night, at five minutes past eleven, only an hour before the expiry of the term of grace, the Treaty was signed.

"We are good friends now," said Kitchener, as he shook hands with the representatives of the late Republics.

APPENDICES

I

COLONIAL CONTINGENTS SENT TO SOUTH AFRICA

CANADA

Contingent.	Number.		Arrived in S.A.	Left S.A.
	Off.	Men.		
1st Contingent.				
2nd Bn. R. Can. Regt.	44	995	30 Nov. 1899	Oct. 1900
Draft for do.	3	100	Early Apr. 1900	
2nd Contingent.				
1st Bn. Canadian Mtd. Rifles (Royal Canadian Dragoons from Aug. 1, 1900)	19	360	21 Mar. 1900	Nov. 1900
2nd Bn. Canadian Mtd. Rifles (Canadian Mtd. Rifles from Aug. 1, 1900)	21	357	26 Feb. 1900	13 Dec. 1900
Brigade Div. R. Canadian Artillery	19	520	16 Feb. 1900	13 Dec. 1900
Strathcona's Horse	29	562	10 Apr. 1900	Jan. 1901
3rd Contingent.				
2nd Regt. Canadian Mounted Rifles, with draft	45	880	Feb. 1902	27 June, 1902
10th Canadian Field Hospital Co. A.M.C.	5	56	Feb. 1902	do.
4th Contingent.				
3rd Regt. Canadian Mounted Rifles	26	483	30 May, 1902	2 July, 1902
4th Regt. Canadian Mounted Rifles	26	483	June, 1902	do.
5th do. do.	26	483	do.	do.
6th do. do.	26	483	do.	do.
Total.	289	5,762		

N.B.—Canada contributed 30 officers and 1,208 N.C.O.'s and men to the South African Constabulary—not included in the above figures.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Contingent.	Number.		Arrived in S.A.	Left S.A.
	Off.	Men.		
1st Contingent.				
N.S.W. Lancers	9	163	Nov. 1899 and Mar. 1900	Oct. 1900
1 co. N.S.W. Army Med. Corps (Field Hospital and Bearer Co.)	10	105	2 Dec. 1899	Dec. 1900
"A" Battery N.S.W. Arty.	5	174	5 Feb. 1900	July, 1901
Draft for do.	1	43	April, 1901	do.
2nd Contingent.				
1st Regt. N.S.W. Mtd. Rifles	6 4 20	124 121 381	7 Dec. 1899 and 19 Feb. 1900	April, 1901
1 co. N.S.W. Army Med. Corps (Field Hospital, Bearer Co. and Mtd. Bearer Co.)	10	105	17 Feb. 1900	Dec. 1900
1st Australian Horse (1 sq.)	8	130	23 Feb. 1900	Nov. 1900
3rd Contingent.				
Citizen's Bushmen (1st Regt. Australian Bushmen)	33	498		
4th Contingent.				
6th Regt. N.S.W. Imp. Bushmen	40	722	17 May, 1900	18 June, 1901
5th Contingent.				
2nd Regt. Imp. N.S.W. Mtd. Rifles	36	673	13 Apr. 1901	3 May, 1902
3rd do. do. do.	40	1,046	End do.	do.
3rd N.S.W. Imperial Bushmen (formed May, 1901, from drafts sent out for the Citizen's and 6th Regt. Imperial Bushmen)	13	479	From end of 1901 to Mar. 1902	June, 1902
6th Contingent.				
1st Bn. Aust. Com. Horse	21	351	Mar. 1902	
2nd do. do.	22	351	April, 1902	
5th do. do.	26	467	June, 1902	
Army Medical Corps	3	36	April, 1902	
Total	305	5,969		

VICTORIA

Contingent.	Number. Off.	Men.	Arrived in S.A.	Left S.A.
1st Contingent	12	240	Nov. 1899.	Dec. 1900
2nd do. (called 3rd Bushmen)	15	250	6 Feb. 1900	May, 1901
3rd do.	15	261	12 Apr. 1900	June, 1901
4th do. (Imp. Bushmen).	31	598	May, 1900	26 June, 1901
5th do.	146	971	Mar. 1902	3 Apr. 1902
2nd Bn. Aust. Commonwealth Horse	20	371	do.	July, 1902
4th do. do. (2nd Commonwealth Contingent)	17	235	Apr. 1902	do.
6th Bn. Aust. Commonwealth Horse	22	467	beg. June, 1902	do.
Total.	248	3,393		

QUEENSLAND

1st Queensland Contingent (M.I.)	14	250	13 Dec. 1899	13 Dec. 1900
2nd do. do.	10	150	Jan. 1900	3 May, 1901
3rd do. do.	16	298	Mar. 1900	13 June, 1901
4th Queensland Imperial Bushmen	25	372	June, 1900	6 Aug. 1901
5th do. do.	23	517	Mar. 1901	30 Apr. 1902
6th do. do.	17	422	Apr. 1901	20 June, 1902
Aust. Commonwealth Horse.	6	122	Mar. 1902	
do. do.	5	116	19 May, 1902	
do. do.	23	466	22 June, 1902	
Total.	139	2,713		

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

1st Contingent ("S. Aust. Infy.")	6	121	26 Nov. 1899	3 Nov. 1900
2nd Cont. (with 1st Cont. known as S. Aust. M.R.)	8	113	25 Feb. 1900	29 Mar. 1901
3rd S. A. Bushmen Cont. (1st Bushmen's Corps)	6	94	11 Apr. 1900	April, 1901
4th S. Aust. Imp. B. Corps	12	218	29 May, 1900	7 July, 1901
5th do. do.	22	303	25 Mar. 1901	April, 1902
6th do. do.	11	127	29 Apr. 1901	do.
1st Aust. Com. Horse, D Co. 2nd Bn.	5	116	17 Mar. 1902	5 July, 1902
2nd Aust. Com. Horse, C Co. 4th Bn.	5	116	29 May, 1902	
3rd Aust. Com. Horse, 8th Bn.	10	231	21 June, 1902	
Total	85	1,439		

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Contingent.	Number.		Arrived in S.A.	Left S.A.
	Off.	Men.		
1st Contingent	5	125	Nov. 1899	Nov. 1900
2nd do. (called 3rd Bushmen)	6	97	Feb. 1900	Mar. 1901
3rd do. (W.A. M.I.-Bushmen's Cont.)	7	109	Apr. 1900	Apr. 1901
4th do. (Bushmen)	7	119	June, 1900	July, 1901
5th do.	13	207	Mar. 1901	Apr. 1902
6th do.	13	214	Apr. 1901	do.
E sq. 2nd Bn. Aust. Com. Horse	2	58	Mar. 1902	5 July, 1902
Aust. Army Med. Corps (W. Aust. Section)	..	7	do.	do.
D sq. 4th Bn. Aust. Com. Horse	5	115	Apr. 1902	11 July, 1902
D sq. 8th Bn. Aust. Com. Horse	4	116	June, 1902	27 June, 1902
Total.	62	1,167		

TASMANIA

1st Contingent	4	72	Nov. 1899	3 Nov. 1900
Draft for above	1	47	18 Feb. 1900	3 Nov.
2nd Contingent (Tasmanian Bushmen's Cont.)	3	49	31 Mar. 1900	19 May, 1901
3rd Contingent (1st Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen)	5	119	May, 1900	7 July, 1901
4th Contingent (2nd Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen)	11	243	24 Apr. 1901	22 May, 1902 (8 and 159)"
E sq. 1st Aust. Com. Horse	3	60	14 Mar. 1902	11 July, 1902
E sq. 3rd Aust. Com. Horse	5	116	10 May, 1902	do.
C sq. 8th Aust. Com. Horse	5	115	21 May, 1902	
Total.	37	821		

NEW ZEALAND

Contingent.	Number. Off.	Number. Men.	Arrived in S.A.	Left S.A.
1st Contingent N.Z. M. Rifles	9	206	Nov. 1899	Nov. 1900
2nd do.	11	247	Feb. 1900	31 Mar. 1901
3rd do.	12	252	Mar. 1900	do.
4th do.	20	446	Apr. 1900	May, 1901
5th do. (Imp. Bushmen)	24	500	do.	do.
(Reserves)	3	68	do.	
6th Contingent	27	551	Feb. 1901	
7th do.	28	572	May, 1901	22 May, 1902 (larger part) July, 1902 (part)
8th do.	45	951	Mar. 1902	July, 1902
(Details)	8	192	do.	
9th Contingent	48	1,028	Apr. 1902	do.
10th do.	45	961	beg. May, 1902	do.
(Details)	7	155	do.	
Total.	287	6,129		

INDIA AND CEYLON

Lumsden's Horse	15	292	25 Mar. 1900	Dec. 1900
1st Ceylon Contingent (M.I.)	6	119	18 Feb. 1900	About 12 mths. later
2nd do. do.	5	98	May, 1900	
Total.	26	509		

GRAND TOTAL . . . Officers, 1,478; Men, 27,902.

II

SOUTH AFRICAN CORPS

‡ Corps raised at the beginning of the war. † Permanent Regular Corps.
* Corps raised in Lord Kitchener's period. § Permanent Volunteer Corps.

Name of Corps.	Remarks.
*Ashburner's Light Horse	About 130.
§Bechuanaland Rifles	Cape Colonial Vols. 100 early 1900.
‡Bethune's M.I.	Originally raised in Natal and composed of Uitlanders. 500 Jan. 1900.
‡Border Horse	Raised in E. Cape Colony, Feb. 1900. 200 March, 1900; with Colonial Division.
§Border Mounted Rifles	About 250 strong. Natal Volunteers.
*Border Scouts	280 original strength. 500 Jan. 1901 and 786 later. 550 Jan. 1902. Chiefly half-castes raised at Upington, May 1900, as local defence.
‡Brabant's Horse (1st and 2nd regts.)	600 each regiment, Jan. 1900. With Colonial Division.
†British S.A. Police	1,106 Oct. 1899.
*Bushmanland Borderers	Raised in 1901; in 1902 600.
*Bushveld Carbineers	First called Bushveld Rifles, and title changed to Pietersburg Light Horse, Mar. 1902.
*Cape Colony Cyclist Corps	Formed Jan. 1901. 500 strong.
§Cape Garrison Artillery	560 Feb. 1900. Cape Colonial Vols.
§Cape Medical Staff Corps	144 early 1900. Cape Colonial Vols.
†Cape Mounted Rifles	Permanent regular force. 900 original strength. 924 Oct. 1899.
†Cape Mounted Rifles Royal Artillery.	
†Cape Police	Permanent force. 800 original strength. About 750 beginning of war.
§Cape Town Highlanders	464 Feb. 1900.
*Colonial Light Horse	About 4 squadrons.
‡Colonial Scouts	Natal Vols. Raised Nov. 1899, 500 strong, later 700. Disbanded March 1900.
‡*Commander-in-chief's Body-guard	Formed Jan.–Feb. 1900, 100 strong. Reorganised to 570 strong. 1,000 Apr. 1901.
*Cullinan's Horse	1 squadron.
‡Damant's Horse	Late Rimington's Guides, which see.
*Dennison's Scouts	Raised at Vryburg, Sept. 1900. About 80.
§Diamond Fields Artillery	About 120.
§Diamond Fields Horse	About 180.
*Driscoll's Scouts	422 June, 1901.
§D. of Edinburgh's Own Volunteer Rifles	Cape Colony Vol. Force. 1,000, Dec. 1899.

Name of Corps.	Remarks.
§Durban Light Infantry	476, Oct. 1899–Oct. 1900.
‡East Griqualand Mounted Rifle Volunteers.	
‡Eastern Province Horse	Raised Feb. 1900, about 100.
‡French's Scouts	Raised end 1899. 3 squadrons, but less later.
‡Frontier Light Horse	3 squadrons, end 1900.
‡Frontier Mounted Rifles	See Border Horse.
§Grahamstown (1st City) Volunteers	See under Marshall's Horse. 580 Jan. 1900.
‡1st Imperial Light Horse	Raised Oct. 1899. 500.
‡2nd Do. Do. Do.	Raised end of 1900. 500.
‡Imperial Light Infantry	Rand refugees. About 1,000, Jan. 1900, but disbanded soon after.
*Johannesburg Mounted Rifles	Raised Jan. 1901. 600 April 1901.
§Kaffrarian Rifles	Raised in East London. 700 early 1900; with Colonial Division.
‡Kimberley Light Horse	About 400 at the start.
‡Kimberley Mounted Corps	600, May 1900.
§Kimberley Regiment	650, Dec. 1899. 800 Feb. 1900.
*Kitchener's Fighting Scouts: 1st Corps (Col. J. W. Colenbrander) 2nd Corps (Col. A. E. Wilson)	Raised Dec. 1900 by Colenbrander. 2 corps of about 400 each.
‡Kitchener's Horse	600, Jan. 1900. 428, March 1900.
‡Loch's Horse	Raised Feb. 1900, largely recruited in England. About 220, March 1900.
‡Marshall's Horse	Raised in Grahamstown. Included Grahamstown Volunteers and Uitenhage Volunteers. 244 Oct. 1899, 120 June 1901.
*Menné's Scouts	Disbanded Jan. 1902. Originally formed part of the Colonial Scouts.
*Midland Mounted Rifles	Raised early 1901. Colonial Defence Force.
‡Montmorency's Scouts	100, early 1900.
*Namaqualand Border Scouts	Raised July 1901, 362 strong. Half castes.
‡Natal Bridge Guards	60. Raised Oct. 1899.
§Natal Carbineers	508 Oct. 1899, 465 Jan. 1900, 131 Sept. 1900.
§Natal Field Artillery.	123 Oct. 1899. Called out again Sept. 1901.
§Natal Mounted Rifles	220 Oct. 1899. Called out again Sept. 1901.
§Natal Naval Volunteers	120. Served from Oct. 1899 to June 1900.
†Natal Police	317 Oct. 1899.
§Natal Royal Rifles	150. Served from Oct. 1899 to Oct. 1900.
§Natal Volunteer Medical Corps	78 Oct. 1899, 50 Sept. 1901.
§Natal Volunteer Veterinary Corps	10 Oct. 1899, 10 Sept. 1901.
*National Scouts	1,480 May 1902. Boers.
‡Nesbitt's Horse	Raised in E. Cape Colony. About 300 Dec. 1899, 400 Jan. 1900. With Colonial Division.
*New England Mounted Rifles	Cape Colonial Irregular Corps.
*Orange River Colony Volunteers	Boers. 480 May 1902.

Name of Corps.	Remarks.
‡Orpen's Horse	Raised in Hopetown district, Jan. 1900. 300 Dec. 1900.
*Pietersburg Light Horse	Formerly Bushveld Carbineers.
§Prince Alfred's Own Cape Artillery	Port Elizabeth Volunteers. Raised to 120 Dec. 1899.
§Prince Alfred's Own Volunteer Guard	600 Dec. 1899, 200 June 1901. Port Elizabeth Volunteers. With Colonial Division.
*Prince of Wales' Light Horse	Recruited at Capetown, Jan. 1901. 501 June 1901.
‡Protectorate Regiment	470 at Mafeking. Disbanded end 1900.
§Queenstown Rifle Volunteers	300 Dec. 1899. With Colonial Division.
‡Railway Pioneer Regiment	750 Feb. 1900.
*Rand Rifles	Raised end of 1900.
‡Rhodesian Regiment.	420 beginning of war. Chiefly recruited at ports in Cape Colony.
‡Rimington's Guides	About 150 Nov. 1899, 175 Dec. 1900. Known as Damant's Horse, Jan. 1901.
‡Roberts's Horse	600 Jan. 1900, 120 June 1901.
*Scott's Railway Guards	500 strong. On Orange River-Kimberley line.
*1st Regiment Scottish Horse	Raised Feb. 1901, 6 squadrons. 450 June 1901
*2nd Regiment Scottish Horse	5 squadrons. 500 June 1901.
‡South African Light Horse	Formed Nov. 1899. 600 early 1900. 500 June 1901.
§South Rhodesian Volunteers	About 800.
‡Steinaecker's Horse	Raised June 1900. 450.
*Tempest's Scouts	38 June 1901.
‡Thorneycroft's M.I.	500 Nov. 1899, and Jan. 1900. 168 June 1901.
§Transkei Mounted Rifles	125 Dec. 1899. 71 early 1900.
§Uitenhage Volunteer Rifles	412 early 1900. See Marshall's Horse.
§Umvoti Mounted Rifles	130 Jan. 1900. 100 June 1900; disbanded Oct. 1900. Natal Volunteers.
*Warren's M.I.	Formed Dec. 1900. About 3 squadrons. 180 June 1901. In Cape Colony.
*Western Province Mounted Rifles	Formed Dec. 1900, in Cape Colony.

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